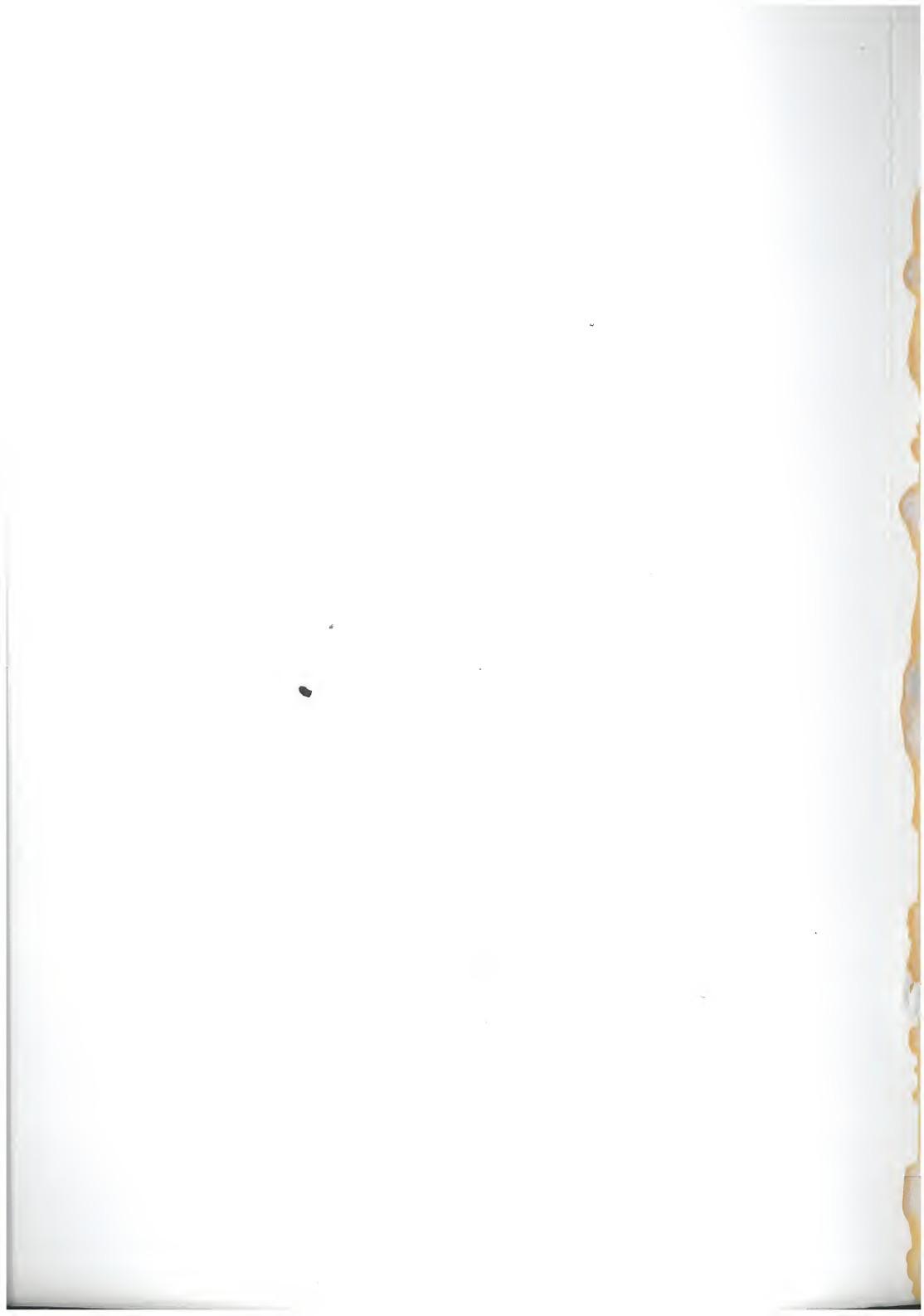


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From the Editorial Board of the
Pacific Journal of Theology:

*'We are honoured to host the papers from the OBSA
Conference held at the Pacific Theological College
in August 2013.'*

Tessa Mackenzie (Chair)





Nāsili Vaka'uta

*Rev. Nasili Vaka'uta
(nvaka'uta@tcv.ac.nz)
is a Tongan Methodist
fiafekau. He taught at
Sia'atoutai Theological
College from 1992 to 2004.
He is currently serving in
the Methodist Church of
NZ as the Ranston Lecturer
in Biblical Studies, Trinity
Theological College, and
an Honorary Academic
at the School of Theology,
University of Auckland.
He is also Regional Editor
for SBL's IVBS series, and
a member of Colloquium's
Editorial Board, and several
biblical studies societies. He
is the author of two books,
several book chapters, and
peer-reviewed articles.*

Editorial

What is Oceanic Biblical Interpretation (OBI)? Is it possible to talk about OBI? What defines/characterises OBI? What contributions can it make to biblical scholarship and interpretation? Where does OBI begin? To what end? For whom? How shall one go about doing it? What are its limits? These, and other related, questions were addressed by, and discussed amongst, speakers and participants during the inaugural meeting of the Oceania Biblical Studies Association (OBSA) held at the Pacific Theological College in Suva, 1-3 August 2013.

This inaugural meeting was not the first OBSA gathering, but it was special in some ways. First, PTC continues the tradition set by previous hosts. The staff and students were generous, and thus created a great atmosphere for the participants. Second, PTC was the fitting venue for the inaugural gathering given that it has faithfully served the region by training most of Oceania's biblical scholars. Third, the conception and formation of OBSA came about partly



because of efforts and visions of former PTC students.

OBSA is a gathering for those who—irrespective of status, belief, education, and background—are interested in reading the Bible in the light of Oceania's rich and diverse cultures. This calls for a serious consideration of Oceania's many knowledge traditions, value systems, world-views, experiences, and issues that threaten the well-being of its islands and people (such as climate change, neo-colonialism, neo-liberalism, and migration, to name a few). OBSA is not an exclusive or elitist group; nor is it for academics and theologians only.

It was agreed at the inaugural meeting that OBSA works toward the following aims, and be open to others as it navigates and (re)generates:

- *Foster biblical interpretation in Oceania*: OBSA will encourage critical, creative and local ways of interpreting scriptures in Oceania;
- *Appreciate local wisdom*: OBSA will engage with local voices, methods and interests, in the various theological, social, communal and political settings around Oceania;
- *Guide and mentor interpreters*: OBSA will provide opportunities for the elders, scholars, students and researchers of Oceania to interact and cooperate;
- *For local churches*: OBSA will serve the health of and hopes for local churches in Oceania;
- *Kindle cooperation*: OBSA will build relationships with other associations of biblical and cultural interpretation in Oceania, Asia, Africa, Caribbean, and yonder;
- *Share and disseminate*: OBSA will seek ways whereby interpreters in Oceania may share their insights with interpreters outside of the region through forums and publications.

This volume is the first publication from OBSA and it consists of selected papers from this year's inaugural gathering. These papers represent not only the diverse nature of subjects shared at the meeting, but also the richness of perspectives and ideas.

The first paper comes from Jione Havea with the title: “*Fekuki* of the Gibeonites (Joshua 9-10), tricking Oceania biblical interpretation.” Havea explains that *fekuki* is a Tongan word that translates as “engagement.” When hyphenated, *fe-kuki* invites two other meanings, influenced by the English language: one who wants to cook (*kuki*) and/or to be [Captain] Cook. *Fe-kuki* can thus also nourish and feed, as well as suppress and colonize. This paper offers a

talanoa-style reading of the *fekuki* of the Gibeonites in Joshua 9-10 (they tricked their way into the Israelite community), in the process of which a response is made to the OBSA call for methods of Oceania biblical interpretation. Havea proposes *fekuki* as an attitude for doing biblical interpretation and encourages readers in Oceania not to be bothered with not having clear Oceanic methods but to be bold in reading with Oceanic attitudes and perspectives.

In the second paper, “Towards an Ecological Reading of the Law of the Sotah,” Anthony Rees acknowledges that biblical criticism is deeply indebted to the insights offered and ground gained by feminist scholars. This includes both the fresh interpretive work done by these scholars, as well as the methodological gains which are felt across much of our discipline. The law of the Sotah, according to Rees, is one which has attracted much feminist critique, and rightfully so. His paper uses insights from feminist in an initial attempt to read the text ecologically, paying attention to the use of water and poisons.

The third paper by Samasoni Moleli Alama focuses on Deuteronomy’s ‘National Imagination’ which to him reflects the Samoan *Pulega a Alii ma Faipule*, especially with the idea of YHWH as the landowner. He argues that the some of the key concepts like inheritance and law share the common goal of protecting the land and its ‘gift-giving’ conditions given by God for Israel. Like Yhwh’s crucial role of Landowner in Israel’s settlement in their ‘promised land’, *Pulega alii ma faipule*’s role as landkeepers is also of utmost important in the Samoan village. Today, although the constitution does not recognise the authority of *Pulega alii ma faipule*, it has not prevented *Pulega Alii ma faipule* from exercising their traditional powers over village matters. *Pulega alii ma faipule* keeps Samoa’s three-fold *faasinomaga* (identity) alive – matai title, customary land and Samoan language. And in doing so, the culture thrives well alongside Christianity. By reinforcing rules that promote peaceful communities, *Pulega alii ma faipule* are also promoting Christian living.

The fourth paper—“Celebrating Hybridity: Jesus, the *Tamaalepo* (child of the dark) in Mataio 1:18-26”—shifts from Hebrew Bible texts to the New Testament and focuses on bible translation and language. Mose Mailo claims that translation and production of native Bibles during the colonial period became a useful operation in the process of language development and cultural change in Oceania. Pioneer missionaries created new languages, cultural symbols, and linguistic systems to relay foreign biblical truths to recipient



languages. As a result, native Bible languages were neither the one (Greek/Hebrew) nor the other (native languages). These literary productions (Bible languages) were culturo-linguistic layered and contained new languages. The historical and original priority, which was central to colonial evangelical mission, was put to test by the presence of Oceanic language and cultural symbols. The master's language (Original languages and English Bibles) becomes a hybrid (neither the one nor the other) *after translation*. Hybridity attracts new methods of reading and interpretation, and Oceania Bibles become an unexpected textual site of resistance and creativity in reading and interpretation. They open up a contentious political site for colonial representation, where native readers can contend authoritative readings and dominant interpretations. His rereading of Matthew or Mataio 1: 18-26 offers an example.

Vaitusi Nofoaiga, in the fifth paper, offers a Samoan perspective on discipleship in Matthew 4:12-25. To him, traditional discipleship as introduced by the missionaries into Samoa in the 1830s has guided the teachings and practice of discipleship membership and undertaking in Samoan society. The Samoan people saw in this Christian tradition a change that would benefit and improve their lifestyle. But beside many good results of discipleship undertaking there were some failures. For example, some social, cultural and economic problems occurring in families in the Samoan community are outcomes of our people's utter commitment to fulfilling the belief that caring for the church needs are more important than family needs. It is a mindset shaped and reinforced by the so-called considered and accepted traditional interpretation/s of discipleship in the bible in the Christian world community. For example, the traditional interpretation of Jesus' calling of the four fishermen in Matthew 4:18-22 considers men as the first disciples who are expected to leave their families, and move on to undertaking discipleship at the global level. A disciple's leaving his family to follow Jesus implies regarding the church needs more important than the local family/ies'. That interpretation contradicts Nofoaiga's understanding of the *faaSamoa's*, and Jesus' proclamation of the *basileia* of the heavens' giving attention firstly to the needs and rights of local people. He argues from the Samoan perspective of "*tautua i le va* (serve/service in-between)" that Jesus' relationship to the crowd shows discipleship as a mission that considers firstly the needs and rights of local people.'

Included in this volume are two papers with anthropological and theological orientations. Terry Pouono, in the sixth paper, writes from a

theological standpoint with attention to the Samoan concept of “*teu le vā*.” He describes that the concept of ‘*Teu le vā*’ has been applied by contemporary Pacific scholars, referring to a negotiating and mediating of relationships between Pacific and non-Pacific cultures and forms of knowledge. He then sets out firstly to investigate ‘*Teu le Vā*’ as advanced in contemporary secular investigations, which he claims ignores to an extent, the cosmological beliefs that are central to understanding its exposition. Secondly, he addresses the implications of ‘*Teu le Vā*’ within the framework of Samoan community with particular focus on the Samoan church. He argues that despite the ethical constituents of ‘*Teu le Vā*’ in preserving balance and harmony in relations, the concept and practice adversely promotes increasing social, economic and political imbalance between the ‘haves and the have nots’ in the Samoan community in Aotearoa.

The final paper, though not the least, shares some anthropological perspectives on Oceanic Biblical Interpretation. Matt Tomlinson presents an overview of anthropological scholarship on the historical and cultural applications of four specific verses in particular contexts. First, he examines the uses of John 1:1 in highland Papua New Guinea in the early 1990s as analyzed by Joel Robbins, who discusses the ways the term was used by Urapmin to make sense of changing understandings of divinity and sacred language. Second, he describes the use of Ecclesiastes 10:8 and Genesis 1:26 in Fiji, as observed decades ago by Alan Tippett and more recently by himself, noting that these verses’ profound ontological claims contain a hint of ambiguity which might, counterintuitively, make them more rather than less popular. Finally, he examines different uses of John 3:16 in various contexts. Tomlinson argues that a culturally engaged approach to understanding the Bible’s use suggests that Oceania’s diversity is best understood by theologians and anthropologists working together. This challenge provides a proper closure to this volume. *Mālō ‘au’upito!*

Fekuki of the Gibeonites (Joshua 9-10), tricking Oceania biblical interpretation



The peoples of the Pacific, as they adopted Christianity, also adapted it. The transmutations were not easily detected by white missionaries. Island societies take what they approve and shape it to fit their own cultures. They are polite and grateful toward the importers; among themselves they test and sift introduced goods and ideas. (Garrett 1982, 253)

Jione Havea

Rev. Dr. Jione Havea (jione@nsw.uca.org.au), a Methodist pastor from Tonga, is Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies and PhD Course Coordinator at United Theological College and the School of Theology, Charles Sturt University, and a Principal Researcher at the Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre.

Abstract

Fekuki is a Tongan word that translates as “engagement.” When hyphenated, *fe-kuki* invites two other meanings, influenced by the English language: one who wants to cook (*kuki*) and/or to be [Captain] Cook. *Fe-kuki* can thus also nourish and feed, as well as suppress and colonize.

This article offers a talanoa-style reading of the *fekuki* of the Gibeonites in Joshua 9-10 (they tricked their way into the Israelite community), in the process of which a response is made to the OBSA call for methods of Oceania biblical interpretation (OBI).¹ The trickery of the Gibeonites invites the shifting of sympathies, from uncritically favoring the invading Israelites toward appreciating the courage of natives to fool the invaders. The Gibeonites were enslaved to

work at the temple of the invaders (to draw water, and to be hewers of wood), but readers have not learned to appreciate their courage to fekuki, to engage, instead of turning and be methodically pushed over.

Distinguishing methodology from perspective and attitude, and seeing that obsession with methodology is one of the marks of modernity, i conclude that there is nothing wrong with not having rigorous- and Western-defined interpretive methodologies. But there is everything wrong with suppressing local perspectives and attitudes in doing biblical interpretation in Oceania. In the end, this article proposes fekuki as an attitude for doing biblical interpretation and encourages readers in Oceania not to be bothered with not having clear Oceanic methods but to be bold in reading with Oceanic attitudes and perspectives.

Keywords: Achan; Fekuki; Gibeonites; Joshua 9-10; OBSA; Oceania biblical interpretation; Rahab; Talanoa; trickery

Talanoa is rich in Joshua 9-10, and in the lead up to it. The Gibeonites were peoples of the land who tricked their way into the Israelite community. They were neither naïve nor panicky, but calm and shrewd. John Garrett's description of the peoples of the Pacific (see block quote above) could apply to the Gibeonites as well. Not only did they fooled the leaders of Israel but they made Yhwh work for them as well. Israel and Yhwh stopped the sun and the moon on their tracks so that they may fight for and defend the Gibeonites. The upshot is that the Gibeonites were no longer outsiders, which is to say that "Israel" contained (uncircumcised?) non-Israelites. This article will unfold the richness in and around the Gibeonites' trick.

The readings and invitations that I² propose in this article are made on the ripples and rhythms of talanoa, a term that carries three meanings—story, telling, conversation—and which has been variously theorized (see e.g., Havea 2010a, 2010b, 2013). My talanoa approach is nontraditional (in the Western academic sense) and i am unapologetic about breaking from the expectations for this kind of exercise of writing an academic article. This article is not academic in the traditional sense, but in the organic senses of talanoa.

To set the ripples of talanoa in motion, i insert two slides which, together, indicate where i am going (*sa lako i vei?*) in this article.³ The first slide



gives a snapshot of the lead up to Josh 9-10 in order to locate “Rahabilitation” and “Achanize” in the flow of the talanoa (story, narrative). It is a talanoa-thing to give careful attention to the flow of talanoa (story, telling, conversation).⁴ This slide will help make sense of the reading proposed in the next section.

sa lako i vei?

- **Josh 1:** Joshua takes over from Moses
- **Josh 2:** Rahab (*Vaka'uta: “Rahabilitation”*)
- **Josh 3-4:** Israel crosses the Jordan
- **Josh 5:** Gilgal (*stones, circumcision, shame*)
- **Josh 6:** Jericho
- **Josh 7:** Ai {1} ← Achan (*Achanize [agonize]*)
- **Josh 8:** Ai {2}
- **Josh 9-10:** Gibeonites (*fekuki*)

The second slide charts the movement of this article, in which i weave readings of biblical texts with theoretical reflections. My primary objective is to offer a talanoa (telling) about the talanoa (story) of the Gibeonites. The hope herein is to encourage talanoa (conversation) with and among readers and researchers. The theoretical and hermeneutical mats woven in the unfolding of my reading are the bonuses (if i may be bald-faced) of this article.

My reading is not cluttered with references to secondary resources. Why not? Because i am seeking to do a talanoa-thing and none of the commentators understand what that involves. I will at another opportunity return to Josh 9-10 in order to fekuki with other readers and commentators. On this occasion, i am all for the talanoa-thing and there is already enough material there for a full-length article.

sa lako i vei?

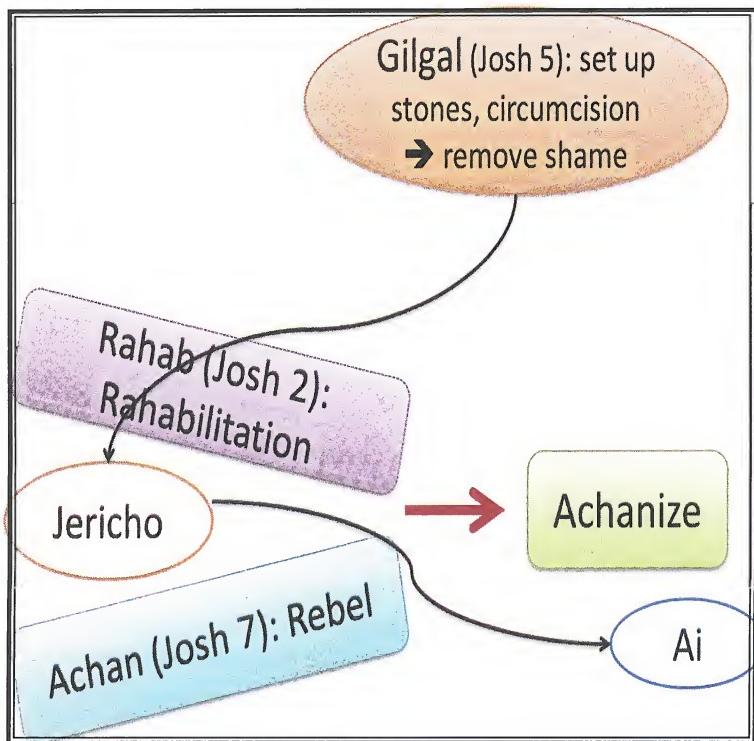
- 1. Achanize [agonize]
(Josh 7)
- 2. Pasifika attitudes & perspectives
- 3. Gibeonites (Josh 9)
- 4. Talanoa
- 5. Narrative Israelites
(Josh 10)
- 6. Fekuki

OBI: Oceania Biblical Interpretation ...
methods?
perspectives?
attitudes?



1. Achanize [agonize]

Moses was dead and left behind in the Wilderness, at a place no one knows where, and Joshua stepped up (Josh 1) to lead Israel across the Jordan (Josh 3-4). Their first stop was at Gilgal, where they set up the twelve stones taken from the Jordan (Josh 4:19-24), and where the men who had not been circumcised since they departed Egypt received the mark of Abram's covenant (Gen 17:9-14). These events were meant to roll the shame away from Israel (Josh 5). Circumcision was not unique to the Israelites, for since days of old Egyptians and Aboriginal Australians circumcised their males as well, but this practice has become the sign of Israel's covenant with God. This is obviously a men's story, making Nāsili Vaka'uta's call for the "Rahabilitation" of our reception of the story about Israel's first target, Jericho (Josh 6-7), crucial (Vaka'uta 2014).



Israel's invasion of Jericho was possible because of Rahab's assistance (Josh 2). Israel needed the aid of a local woman, similar to the role of Pocahontas in the story of the invasion of North America (see Rowlett 2000), and of many local women in our region. Vaka'uta's Rahabilitation invites us to remember the contribution by local women to Israel's success. Rahab, a woman, and a Canaanite, crossed the gender and ethnic lines—she was a double whammy, but dominant readers do not engage with her on those fronts.

Resistance and rebellion (*fekuki*) in fact envelope the storied events in Jericho, which closed with Achan keeping some of the wealth of Jericho for himself, instead of proscribing everything as Joshua instructed (Josh 7:1). In the eyes of the biblical narrator, Achan was wrong to act against his leader so he deserved to be punished. But Rahab did the same against her king at the beginning of the Jericho story (Josh 2). She stepped over to the side of the Israelites; she betrayed her people. The outcome in both instances was defeat: Israel was defeated by Ai because of Achan, and Jericho was defeated by Israel because of Rahab. Because the biblical narrator favors Israel, Achan is presented as a rebel while Rahab was a heroine. Achan and his family, together with their livestock and belongings, were stoned (7:24-26), while Rahab and her father's household were spared (6:25).

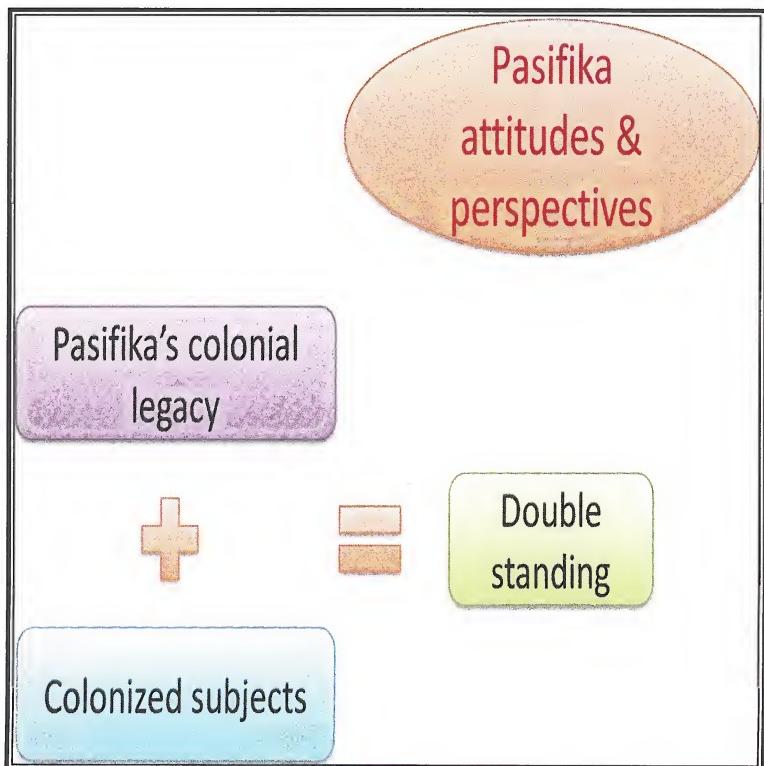
Thanks to Achan, Israel suffered its first defeat (7:2-5). In light of Vaka'uta's Rahabilitation, i suggest that we make room for some "Achan-ize" (playing with "agonize")⁵ as well, for pointing out that Israel was not of the same mind upon arrival nor were their campaigns always successful. There was dissension among them, and they suffered defeat; to Achanize is to highlight the times when there is discord in the Israelite community, and when the colonial drive of Israel was frustrated.

At the end of the story, Achan was stoned and removed, and Israel defeated Ai in their second attempt (Josh 8), but the text does not forget the frustration caused by Achan nor does it ignore that Israel was defeated. Winners write history and their devotees remember them, but the occasional successes of the losers need not be forgotten. For me, it is crucial to remember the losers especially when they are the native people of the land. In the story of Ai, agony was caused by one of the invaders. In the story of the Gibeonites, on the other hand, the native people of the land caused the agony for the invading power.



2. Pasifika attitudes and perspectives

I pause to invite reflection on Pasifika perspectives.⁶ If we recall the interactions in our region prior to the arrival of the palangi and their cultures, our fore-parents navigated and colonized our liquid region. There were tensions and wars between Tongans and Samoans, and both roamed our waters and infiltrated other Polynesian, Melanesian and Micronesian cultures. I am not proud of this part of our history, but it is something that Tongans and Samoans need to name, confess and apologize. Among us Pasifika natives, are colonial histories, tendencies and perspectives.



This of course means that there are Pasifika natives whose lands and cultures the Samoan and Tongan colonialists (i focus my critique on my own heritage) colonized, and i have in mind the Lau Group, Rotuma, Tuvalu,

Tokelau and others. This is not to mention intra-island tribal tensions and wars, which was common throughout the region. Among Pasifika natives therefore are colonial tendencies as well as the scars of subjugation. The colonial legacy in Pasifika is complex. Since context and experience conditions perspectives, some of which have become blind spots with the passage of time and the changing conditions, the complexity of the colonial legacy has (unconsciously) disseminated through Pasifika theologies and biblical readings.

In relation to palangi powers and cultures, on the other hand, Pasifika natives are the colonized subjects. Hence we have “double standing;” we are colonial and subjugated among ourselves, but colonized in relation to palangi. The challenge here is to embody this “double standing” in our reading of biblical texts. It is in this context that the invitation to Rahabilitate and Achanize are made: as Pasifika interpreters, let us be attentive to the presence and contribution of native women and men in the colonial drive, and let us read for and appreciate the instances when the colonial agenda is frustrated and subverted.

If Pasifika perspectives encourage us to affirm native women, people of the land, the losers at the underside of history, and the rebels, then we can easily come under the shadows of liberation and postcolonial hermeneutics, especially in relation to the “option for the poor” and solidarity in “resistance” against powers that be. Whereas there is clear separation in liberation and postcolonial hermeneutics between colonial powers versus the oppressed poor, and between the colonizer versus the colonized, there is room for holding both together in the Pasifika perspectives. The opportunity to “double stand” is represented by the invitation to both Rahabilitate (noting that Rahab was Canaanite) and Achanize (noting that Achan was Israelite).

Whether we name and develop Pasifika method of interpretation is a question to which i will return later, but i stress here that we have Pasifika perspectives that we can contribute to existing hermeneutical methods. The challenge is to not give-in to the structures and rules of those methods, but to nudge them toward Pasifika. To give-in is one of the signs that we drown in the tears of subjugation. To nudge toward our interests, on the other hand, is evidence of the courage to double stand in order to Rahabilitate and Achanize.



3. Gibeonites

The stories about Israel crossing the Jordan, then destroying and dispossessing Jericho and Ai, had spread and caused fear among the nations across the Jordan, and they gathered to defend their land against Joshua and Israel (9:1-2). The Gibeonites decided to take a different approach: “they for their part resorted to cunning” (9:3). Given that the Israelites were brutal against Jericho and Ai, and ruthless against one of their own (Achan), it made sense that the Gibeonites opted to trick them. It would be easier to dupe a mob of thugs than to fight them.

The Gibeonites took dried out provisions, worn-out sacks and wineskins, and came wearing worn-out sandals and clothes to Joshua at Gilgal. Their homes were not far off from Gilgal but they pretended that they have come from a distant land: “We have come from a far country; so now make a treaty with us” (Josh 9:6 NRSV).⁷ They showed Joshua their dried and crumbly bread, their cracked wineskins and worn out clothes, as evidence of how far they have travelled. They would have looked like some of the homeless people in our towns. Joshua and his men were fooled (they addressed them as Hivites in 9:7), and they established friendship with the Gibeonites. In doing so, Joshua and Israel violated the instruction in Deut 7:1-5:

When the LORD your God brings you to the land that you are about to enter and possess, and He dislodges many nations before you—the Hittites, Gergashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, seven nations much larger than you—and the LORD your God delivers them to you and you defeat them, you must doom them to destruction: grant them no terms and give them no quarter. You shall not intermarry with them: do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your children away from Me to worship other gods, and the LORD’s anger will blaze forth against you and He will promptly wipe you out. Instead, this is what you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, smash their pillars, cut down their sacred posts, and consign their images to the fire. (Tanakh)

Gibeonites

(Josh 9)

Dried food, wineskin,
clothes, sandals

Israelites

Much has been made of the failure of Joshua to consult with Yhwh, but not enough attention is given to the wisdom of the Gibeonites. An old rugby tactic matches the Gibeonites' approach: When a huge body runs hard at you, don't tackle it straight-on for you might get hurt in the tackle. Let it run around, then use its weight to throw it down. A light nudge might be enough. If successful, the tumbling of that huge body will be a great tumbling. *Ko e tō labi atu!*

The variation between English translations of Josh 9:14-15 suggest interesting perceptions of the tumbling Israelites:

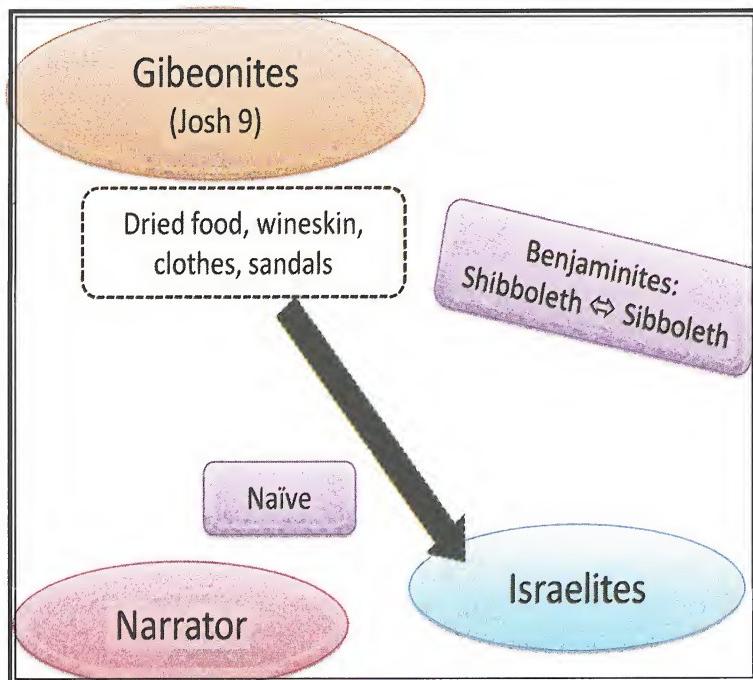
Tanakh: The men took [their word] because of their provisions, and did not inquire of the LORD. Joshua established friendship with them; he made a pact with them to spare their lives, and the chieftains of the community gave them their oath.



NRSV: So the leaders partook of their provisions, and did not ask direction from the LORD. And Joshua made peace with them, guaranteeing their lives by a treaty; and the leaders of the congregation swore an oath to them.

The Tanakh suggests that Joshua and his men accepted the words of the Gibeonites on account of their provisions, but in the NRSV they ate (NIV: “sampled”) the provisions. The Israelites are naïve in the Tanakh but hooked in the NRSV, with line, sinker and all. There is no question in both translations that the Gibeonites conned the Israelites. Joshua then established a treaty with them, and the Israelite leaders endorsed it. Joshua was not alone. The leaders were behind him. The treaty, according to the Tanakh, was “to spare their lives” (so NIV), which could refer only to that one encounter. But the treaty is rendered as “guaranteeing their lives” in NRSV. NRSV commits Israel to a lot more because *guaranteeing someone’s life* is ongoing whereas to *spare one’s life* can be a one-off deal (cf. 9:26). The protection that the Gibeonites received when the five kings attacked (Josh 10), and in the stories of Saul and David (see e.g., 2 Sam 21:1-6), indicate that the treaty made in Josh 9:15 was ongoing (as NRSV suggests).

The naïveté of Joshua and the leaders would balloon in the eyes of readers who cross language borders. The Gibeonites claimed to come from a distant land yet they spoke Joshua’s language. Given that languages and accents are geographically specific, Joshua should have realized that the Gibeonites were pulling his legs. This aspect also reveals naïveté on the part of the biblical narrator, who does not take linguistic diversity seriously. The narrator was careful with the details of the provisions, wineskin, sandals and clothes, but not with one of the key markers of difference when one moves across borders: language. If the Gibeonites were truly from a distant land, they would have difficulty communicating with Joshua.



The narrator in Judg 12:1-6 takes up the significance of linguistic difference. The Ephraimites were asked to pronounce “shibboleth,” but they would say “sibboleth” instead. The outcome was that forty-two thousand of them lost their lives that day. The irony in this contrast is that the Ephraimites were a [half] tribe of Israel, whereas the Gibeonites were non-Israelites. The Gibeonites, though non-Israelites, communicated well with Joshua. They sound like smooth talkers, which explains why Israel was fooled, but this does not rule out the fact that Joshua and Israel were naïve.

It took the Israelites three days to realize that the Gibeonites were their neighbors (9:16). They then set out against the four Gibeonite towns but they could not attack them, because of the treaty that their leaders made (9:17-19). Fracture appears among the Israelites on account of the Gibeonites: they were all fooled, Joshua made the treaty, which the leaders ratified, but now



“the whole community” (NRSV: “congregation”) were not happy with the treaty and they “muttered (NRSV: “murmured”) against the chieftains” (9:18; Tanakh). The Gibeonites were again spared, this time to be “hewers of wood and drawers of water for the whole community, as the chieftains had decreed concerning them” (9:21). The Gibeonites were spared, once again, and the chieftains now made the decision, again without consulting Yhwh.

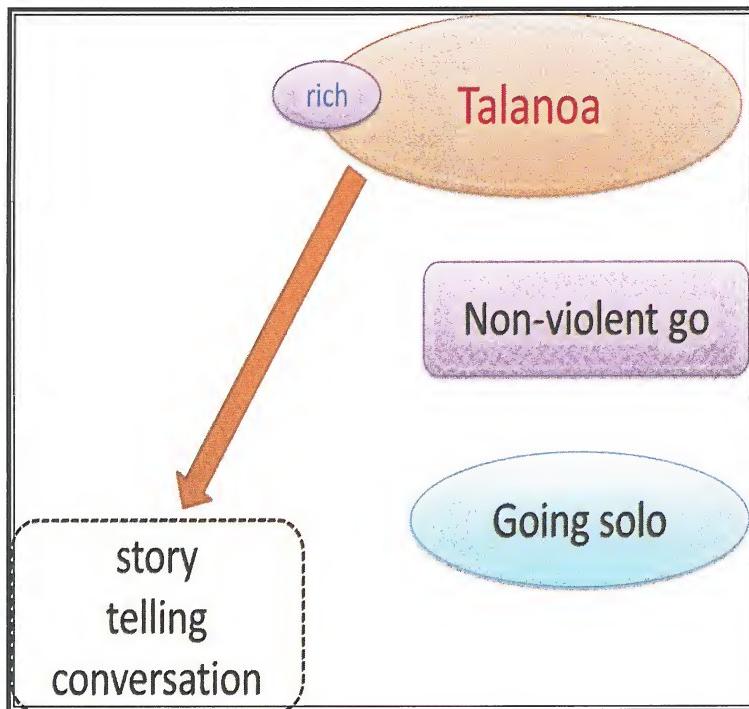
The roles are reversed: Joshua made the treaty and the chieftains/leaders ratified, but this time the chieftains/leaders passed judgment and Joshua comes next but he points in another direction: “Therefore, be accursed! Never shall your descendants cease to be slaves, hewers of wood and drawers of water for the House of my God” (9:23). Instead of ratifying the chieftains’ decision that the Gibeonites will serve “the whole community,” Joshua lets the Gibeonites off a little, to serve only the house of God. Joshua and the leaders/chieftains are not connecting. The narrator steps in to clean things up, making the Gibeonites serve both the community and the altar of Yhwh (9:27). In adding the two verdicts up, the narrator reveals disaccord among the Israelites.⁸

The Gibeonites caused a stir among the invading Israelites. They fooled then divided them up, and they secured their lives and their place among the Israelites. They were enslaved, but it was to a significant place in the life of Israel, since wood and water are essentials in daily living. There is irony in the curse: they conned the Israelites with dried out provisions and outfits, and the Israelites got them to cut wood and draw water. The Gibeonites should no longer have dried out provisions!

To cut wood and draw water for a family would be challenging in a desert setting, and more difficult to provide for a whole people. The Gibeonites got a raw deal, under a people that ended up living a lifetime of sacrifices. Notwithstanding, the Gibeonites got what they wanted: not to be wiped out like the peoples of Jericho and Ai.

4. Talanoa

I pause again, this time in order to return to my opening claim, that “Talanoa is rich in Joshua 9-10.” I make this claim for three reasons.



First, the richness of talanoa is in the courage of a people to “have a non-violent go” at the invaders. In a storied (biblical) world where political powers confront each other with violence, the Gibeonites set a non-violent trend. As readers, we know that the invaders are the elected people of God, making their national and theological identities intersect in their colonial enterprises. Still, the Gibeonites exposed a weakness (*naïveté*) in Israel’s peoplehood. The invaders are brutal, but they are not fool-proof.

Second, the Gibeonites contribute to the richness of talanoa in their opting to “go solo” against Israel. Whereas the five kings across the river gathered in solidarity, for together they have a better chance of defending against Israel, the Gibeonites decided to confront Israel on their own. Here, the degree of separation between bravery and foolishness is not much, but the Gibeonites had the courage to confront their Goliath (cf. 1 Sam 17). Like the uncircumcised Goliath, Israel was gullible.



Third, shifting from the biblical story to Pasifika, talanoa is rich in itself because “talanoa” refers to three things: story, telling, conversation. In this regard, the richness of talanoa in Josh 9-10 is in the story, as i have indicated, as well as in the telling and conversation around it. I talanoa (tell) the talanoa (story) to you in a particular way and look forward to your talanoa (conversation) around it as we engage (fekuki) around Josh 9-10 and the call for methods of Oceania biblical interpretation.

The OBSA planning team called for presentations that identify and construct methods of interpreting biblical texts in Oceania, and talanoa is one possibility for that. Reflection around talanoa as method has begun, and we need to be clear and vigilant about distinguishing talanoa in Pasifika from the romanticizing views about “storytelling.” Talanoa is not just about the telling of stories; talanoa is also about conversation, around which fekuki takes place (see below).

Again i return to the Gibeonites, framing them as people of talanoa. They made up a talanoa (story) which they talanoa (told) to the Israelites, and succeeded to convince (fool) them through talanoa (conversation). In this talanoa-reading, the Gibeonites used talanoa to confront and fool the overlords. Talanoa is not a feel good exercise (as in romanticizing views on “storytelling”) but a devious and manipulative exercise in trickery and survival. Along this line, talanoa is a thrilling Pasifika contribution to the shelves of methodologies in biblical criticism.

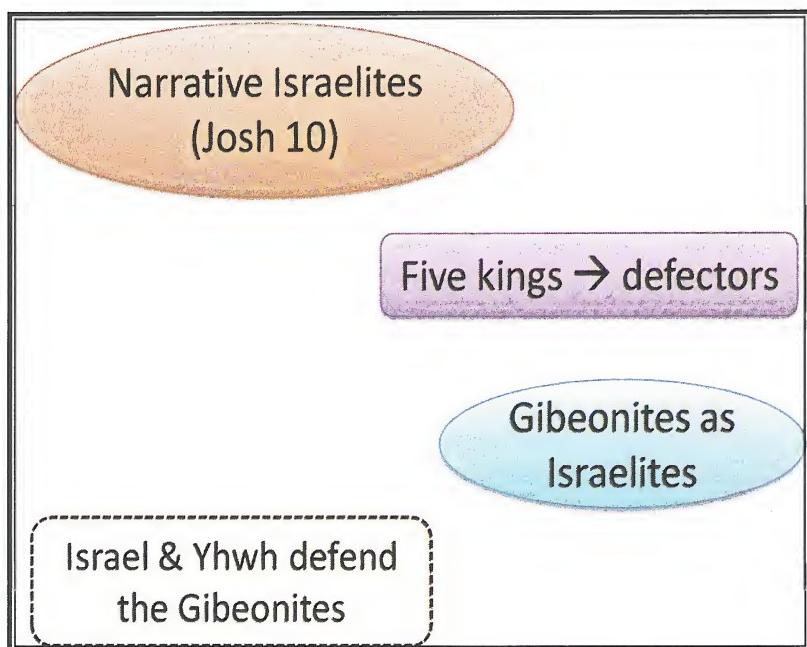
I mentioned the Samoans and Tongans fighting each other in the old days, but we also tricked one another. Fr. Mikaele Paunga reminded me of the “moa moa lulu, niu niu pulu” talanoa (see longer version in Barnes 2005, 257). A wise Sāmoan named Pulelei’ite visited Tonga to test the skills of Tu’i (king) Tonga in solving riddles. When it was time for Pulelei’ite to return, the two men agreed to an exchange. Tu’i Tonga will bring Tongan coconuts (said to be bigger than the Samoan variety) to Samoa for Pulelei’ite, in exchange for Samoan chickens (supposed to be meatier than the Tongan ones). Each man, however, wanted to trick the other. Pulelei’ite collected owls and placed them in baskets; Tu’i Tonga had the nuts removed from the coconuts and put the empty husks (pulu) in baskets. Tu’i Tonga travelled to Samoa, made the exchange with Pulelei’ite, and each man thought he fooled the other. As Tu’i Tonga departed with his goods he called out, “Pulelei’ite, niu, niu … pulu” (coconut, coconut … husk), to which Pulelei’ite responded, “Tu’i Tonga, moa,



moa, lulu" (chicken, chicken ... owl). Trickery is part of who we are as Pasifika people!

5. Narrative Israelites

The talanoa of the Gibeonites continues in Josh 10. Whereas Josh 9:1 gives broad brushstrokes over the region—Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—10:3 is specific about place and its king. Specificity signals that something is about to happen. King Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem rises like a regional leader and called four other Amorite kings—King Hoham of Hebron, King Piram of Jarmuth, King Japhia of Lachish, and King Debir of Eglon (10:5)—to come up and help defeat Gibeon. The Gibeonites were Amorites also (2 Sam 21:2), and so the five Amorite kings may have felt betrayed when the Gibeonites went on their own and aligned with the Israelites. In this reading, the Amorite kings marched out to punish the defectors from their community.



The Gibeonites called on Joshua to deliver them, “So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his whole fighting force, all the trained warriors” (10:7). This was a tour de force. Joshua did not consult Yhwh, but Yhwh quickly enters the story to approve and aid Israel’s campaign (10:8). Yhwh hurled huge stones from the sky and killed more Amorites than the Israelites did with their swords (10:9-12)! Joshua’s confidence would have been boosted by Yhwh’s involvement. Joshua goes further, calling to the sun and the moon to stop in their tracks so that he and his men may finish off the Amorites (10:12b-13a). Yhwh concurred, and acted in obedience to “words spoken by a man” (10:14). Joshua is back in the driver’s seat, and Yhwh is pushed into action. The expression “the tail wags the dog” comes to mind.

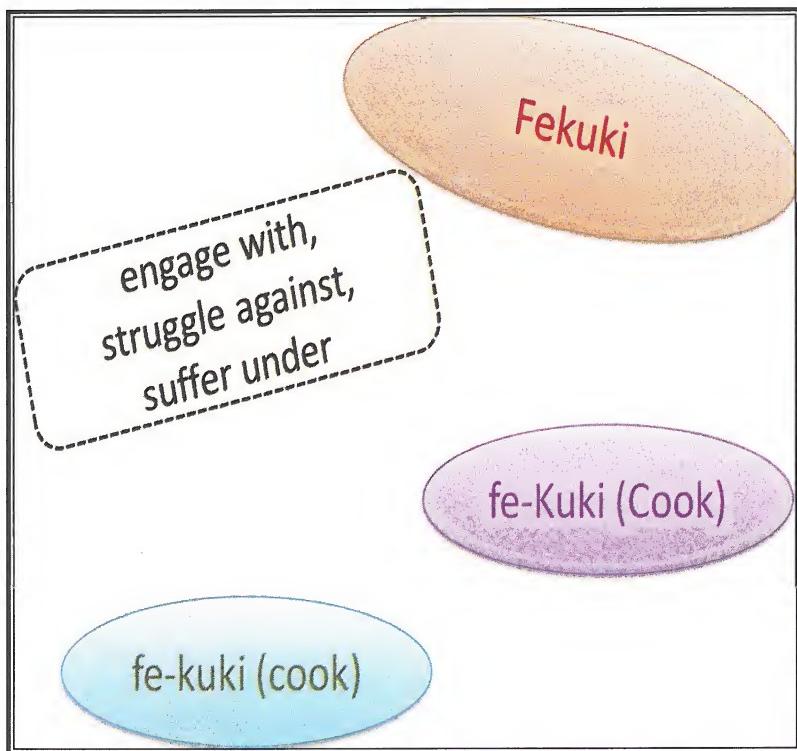
The narrator circles back to the five kings, who escaped and hid in a cave at Makkedah. Joshua ordered large stones to be rolled up against the mouth of the cave, and a guard was posted there while Joshua and his men finished off the rest of the enemies. The massacre was almost complete, “except for some fugitives who escaped in to the fortified towns” (10:20b). Joshua then returned to the five kings, brought them out of the cave, had them killed then impaled until evening, when they were thrown back into the same cave then large rocks were placed over its mouth. Joshua and Israel then continued to invade neighboring lands; the Gibeonites on the other hand were secure with no fellow Amorites bothering them.

At the end of Josh 10, the Gibeonites are no longer outsiders to Israel. The Israelites risked their lives for the Gibeonites, as if they were their own. The Gibeonites were cursed to be slaves, but Israel and Yhwh defended them as if they were Israelite princes and princesses. On the wings of talanoa, the Gibeonites crossed over to become “narrative Israelites.”

6. Fekuki

The Tongan word “fekuki” translates as “engaging with,” “struggling against” or “suffering under” a task, a situation, or a burden. Whether one engages, struggles or suffers depends on “the lot” one faces. One fekuki differently with a task (which ranges e.g., from sweeping the yard to building a home) as compared to an illness, a church or village responsibility, an enemy or robber,

a personal or family debt, the lack of resources, the stigma of stereotypes, expectations, discriminations and so forth. Fekuki is part of living. Whatever fekuki one is in will condition one for what awaits ahead. The stories discussed above show three different forms of fekuki.



First is the fekuki of the Israelites, who came to destroy, dispossess and displace. Israel's invasion is fekuki in the extreme, bringing to mind the colonial legacy in Pasifika and the explorer James Cook whose name, to my Tongan ears, is in the word fe-Kuki. Fekuki, in this form, is about showing and exercising power and control, which continues to cause havoc in our region, as in the militarist and coup cultures of Fiji and in the unstable democratic government of Tonga. Fekuki as manifestation of the colonial legacy is strong in our waters, with many wannabe-Kuki ("fe" has sense of wannabe).



The second form of fekuki is evident in the scheming Gibeonites. They were astute and shrewd, and they succeeded in guaranteeing their survival. Since their tactic involved food, i refer to their manipulative venture as fe-kuki (for “cook”). They cooked things up to assure their survival, but survival cost them their freedom. They lived on to fekuki as slaves to the people whom they tricked. Their fekuki resulted in their compromising who and whom they were.

The third form of fekuki is in the response of the five kings. They came in the spirit of kautaha (see Havea 2012) to fight defectors who have become “narrative Israelites.” For the Amorites, the Gibeonites have become Israelites. The five kings came to fight force with force. They failed, in part because God answered and aided Israel. The five kings suffered the brunt of fekuki against brute bullies and they, so to speak, became cooked.

Drawing upon these three forms of fekuki, i return to the OBSA call for methods of Oceania biblical interpretation (OBI). My contribution to this conversation is that, through talanoa, we fekuki with the biblical text, bearing in mind the three forms of fekuki. Fekuki can be oppressive and colonizing; fekuki can be conniving in the interest of survival; and fekuki can be retaliatory and fruitless.

It does not matter to me at this point if we succeed in constructing OBI “methods,” but it is important that we name and share our “perspectives” and “attitudes.” Talanoa and fekuki are practices that form our perspectives and our attitudes. We are not always conscious of how we talanoa and fekuki, or of how talanoa and fekuki are part of our living. The challenge here, in light of the OBSA call, is to describe talanoa and fekuki as “methods.” This is where my cultural nerves begin to stand on edge: Why do we need to convert ways of living into methodical structures and steps? For whose interests? Academic and scholarly endeavors require methodologies, which we can’t avoid. The catch is this: if we do not name and construct Pasifika methodologies, some non-Pasifika people will do it for us. It is damned if you do and damned if you don’t, and this is one of the fekuki that remains for Pasifika readers and for OBSA.

Notes

¹ This article is a revision of “*Fekuki* with methodological obsessions, and with Gibeonites (Joshua 9-10)” which was presented at the Inaugural meeting of the Oceania Biblical Studies Association (OBSA) held at the Jovili Meo Mission Centre, Pacific Theological College, Suva, Fiji (Aug 02, 2013).

² I use the lowercase “i” because i use the lowercase with “you,” “she,” “they,” and “others” I do not see the point in capitalizing the first person when s/he is because of everyone/everything else.

³ I used slides in my presentation for OBSA and i insert some of those in this article. The powerpoint show is available upon request ([from joneh@nsw.uca.org.au](mailto:joneh@nsw.uca.org.au)).

⁴ So Spivak: “If the main thing about narrative is sequence, the main thing about the oral-formulaic is equivalence” (Spivak 2009, 81).

⁵ Sounds better in Fijian, *A-kana* (Oh, eat!), bearing in mind that cannibalism was practiced in the region, including Samoa and Tonga.

⁶ My rhetoric shifts from Oceania/Oceanic to Pasifika because my focus here is on native peoples rather than on the region and our seascape.

⁷ Gibeon was northwest of Jerusalem with Gilgal to the east, close to Jericho and the Jordan River.

⁸ The references to the “House of God” and “altar of Yhwh” were most likely later glosses, but the effect of inserting them here is that they suggest disaccord between Joshua, the leaders, and the community.

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Anthony Rees

Dr. Anthony Rees is lecturer in Old Testament at Pacific Theological College. He will return to Australia in late 2013 to take up an appointment as Research Fellow at the Centre for Public and Contextual Theology at Charles Sturt University.

Towards an Ecological Reading of the Sotah Ritual

It begins, I think, with the act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the disasters. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practiced discrimination and exclusion.

It was our ignorance and our prejudice, and our failure to imagine these things being done to us. With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds. We failed to ask – how would I feel if this were done to me?

In December 1992, PM Paul Keating gave a speech widely regarded as one of the most significant in Australian political history. He was addressing the reality of Australian failure in regards to the Australia's indigenous people, and slashing a way forward in our slow and troubled journey towards reconciliation – a journey which is by no means nearing its conclusion, sadly enough. Indeed, given that more than



twenty years have passed since this speech, Australia's current situation in regards to indigenous people is a blight on our nation², this despite Kevin Rudd's 'sorry' speech of 2007.

It is not my intention to discuss aboriginal Australia here, but rather, to use Keating's words to enter another discussion: 'our failure to imagine these things happening to us...We failed to ask – how would I feel if this were done to me.' This idea presents a good entry point into a discussion of the bible's attitude to women. But the problem is not just the bible's, but also its readers and rewriters, and readers and rewriters. We have much to be thankful for when we consider the gains of the pioneers of feminist biblical criticism, who have forced us to see things in a new way – a way from which we can not, must not retreat. Thanks to scholars like Phyllis Trible, Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, Kwok Pui-Lan, Athalya Brenner, Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, Suzanne Scholz, and more locally, Elaine Wainwright and Judith MacKinlay, we have learnt, and continue to learn much.

Quite aside from the new readings that these scholars have provided, their methods have enabled other groups to give expression to their own readings: advocacy reading strategies tend to use tools first utilized in our discipline by feminist scholars. So it is with the Earth Bible Commentary series.³ Of course, where the EBC differs is that it is not a human group that readings advocate for, it is Earth, specifically, non-humans. Nonetheless, as Norm Habel has outlined in several places⁴, there is a strong dependence on the methodological gains of feminist criticism, particularly the use of the hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of retrieval, terms well known to anyone with even a passing interest in feminist biblical studies. To this is added one more tool – the hermeneutics of identification, but I will return to this shortly.

Before I come to the ecological aspect of my paper, I do want to think through some of the gendered aspects of this particular text. We most often refer to it as the law of the adulteress, the law of the unfaithful wife (as the 2007 NRSV refers to it), or in Hebrew, Sotah – a word which means to turn aside, to go astray, to be errant. The problem with this is immediately apparent, because this law is said to cover women who have gone astray in a fashion which is hidden from her husband, undetected (though she has defiled herself), and without witnesses, given that she isn't caught in the

act. The problem is, given all of those circumstances, how on earth is the husband to suspect her in the first place? Vs 14 suggests a spirit of jealousy may come upon the husband, given the defiled nature of his wife. But jealousy, or suspicion, and guilt are two very different things. But for the sake of the ritual, that distinction is not so clear, because whether the woman declares guilt or innocence, she is subjected to the ordeal.

But I have too quickly moved ahead. The ambiguity is rife in the opening verses: if a man's wife goes astray (making the wife the subject of the action), if a man has had intercourse with her (making her the object – in Hebrew, covering her with semen), she is undetected (again, the subject), though she has defiled herself (subject), since she was not caught in the act (object). The woman constantly is in flux, at one moment the subject of the action, the next a passive object. The attention quickly turns to the husband and his jealousy, and his capacity in his jealousy to bring his wife to the Priest for the ritual – a place in which his wife becomes very much the object. The husband brings an offering for her, the text tells us. But it is a jealousy offering, and it is the husband, not the wife who suffers from jealousy. The Rabbis are scathing on this: Ramban says that the purpose of the offering is to expose her guilt; Rabban Gamaliel says the offering is the food of a beast, appropriately, seeing as her act was an act of a beast⁵. Notice: guilt is assumed. More recently, Milgrom says 'She is under suspicion of being a brazen, unrepentant sinner.'⁶ That's true. But in adopting that tone without qualification, Milgrom too seems to assume guilt. Actually, it doesn't appear as if there is much suspicion at all. (His assumptions are revealed later, when he refers to her explicitly as 'the guilty woman.'⁷) So perhaps it might be better to call this the law of the jealous husband, given that he is the one to whom true subjectivity belongs. As Elyse Goldstein notes, the text slips between perspectives: at times, the husband's jealousy and insecurity colors the text, at which point, the narrator counters trying to give the illusion of objectivity, but of course, it is too late⁸. Male anxiety hangs over this text like cloud blankets Suva in July.

We come now to the ritual, or the ordeal. Or perhaps we might say that we come to the public part of what, for the woman, has already been an ordeal. The man brings his wife to the Priest for the practice of the rite. The Talmud expands on this part of the process, suggesting that there is opportunity for the woman to declare her guilt or innocence⁹. If she claims to be innocent, the ritual continues on, in order to prove, or perhaps given the ideology of



the text, disprove, her claim of innocence. Talmud also expands the public humiliation the woman is made to suffer. Her clothes are torn from her, her body exposed, a rope tied around her breasts, and whoever wishes to come and look at her is permitted¹⁰.

Then, having been exposed and humiliated, the woman is forced to drink the potion the Priest has concocted. With innocence, there will be no effect. Her reward is that she will be blessed with fertility, and the gift of being able to bear her husband's children. What a great joy that must be to her! With guilt, her stomach will swell, her womb discharge. She will suffer great pain and become an execration to her people. Whichever way it goes, the wife bears her iniquity, and the man is free from iniquity, though by this stage, we could hardly be surprised to hear that.

At this point, I want to return to Keating's words: '..our failure to imagine these things happening to us...We failed to ask – how would I feel if this were done to me?' It seems to me that this text is written from a perspective that has failed to understand the psychological damage that this public humiliation would bring about. Bear in mind that this ritual takes place in the instance where there is no witness, no evidence, no smoking gun. Bear in mind also, that there is no parallel ritual for the wayward husband, no punishment for any male accomplice in an act of adultery.¹¹ Adultery is a capital offense, and in the instance where there is evidence, the guilty parties can be put to death. In those cases, the man is thought to have stolen something from another man – his wife's sex. But in this situation, the equation is slightly different. That is, the woman has stolen something from her husband: honor. And actually, even if she is found to be innocent, the public nature of this public spectacle does little to restore it. But at least he is not shamed, or rather, at least his wife has not dishonored him. No matter which way the ritual goes, however, the wife is shamed. Her clothes torn, her body exposed, her hair disheveled, silenced, surrounded by people quietly hoping she is guilty, forced to drink a potion containing words of great violence, there is no recovery for her. How can she ever trust her husband again? How can she anything but alone?

Perhaps I could be accused of being too involved with this, of allowing emotion to enter into my reading, of identifying too closely with the woman, innocent or guilty. My response is of course, that such emotional responses are necessary to texts that sanctify violence, oppression and discrimination,

precisely because there has been a lack of basic human dignity displayed not just in this text, but also, as I have hinted at throughout, in the history of this text's interpretation. To again gloss Keating, we have failed to make the basic human response. An interest in historical matters, in issues of sources, of ambiguous words and phrases is no excuse for the failure to see the appalling male chauvinism of this spectacle. It is a reality we need to face up to and own. Sure, this text is unfamiliar. Not surprisingly, it makes no appearance in the lectionary. Nonetheless this text of terror is in the pages of our bibles. Theological notions of authority and canonization only make our silence all the more lamentable, making us complicit with an ideology that we must surely disown¹². The practice of this ritual was suspended, because it was thought that the curse would only take effect if the husband was pure. It seems that too few women were suffering for this ritual to continue. But even here, note that the failure of the ritual to work is not thought to be because of the woman's innocence, but because of the less than honorable husband.

Towards an Ecological Reading

To this point I have concerned myself with the treatment of the accused woman, both in the text and in its reception. My paper thus far has ignored the potion given to the woman to drink. It is this potion which gives space for an ecological reading, because the potion brings together certain Earth elements for the purpose of both torturing and humiliating a human.

The first element is water. The water is described here as holy – קדשָׁה. This is the only instance in the Old Testament of this descriptor. Scholars argue about what it might mean, whether it is water from the laver or some other source¹³. Where the water comes from is for me, irrelevant. What is relevant is that this water, used in the brewing of a ritual potion, is said to be holy. And what else is relevant is that this holy water is put to use to bring about great potential suffering.

The second element is the dust of the tabernacle floor. Again, scholars seem interested in where this dust comes from¹⁴. The rabbis were very interested in this, as you might imagine, as if the source of the dust might give an indication of its power. Again, I am not interested in these discussions. What interests me is that dirt from the floor, dust which I imagine is quite unholly given Priestly preoccupations with cleanliness, is placed into a container



(an ‘Earthen vessel’) with holy water. A question could well be, does the water cease to be holy?

These two elements have certain qualities, or they symbolize certain things. Water is a symbol of life, of refreshment, of cleanliness. There is a certain sweetness to water, but when we emphasize those aspects, we forget that water can also be destructive and the conduit of disease. Those of us who live in the Pacific should be all too aware of the realities of such things. In parts of our region, once fertile land is now poisoned by the ever encroaching water of the ocean. Clean water, fresh water, the type of water that once sustained life has been contaminated. The ongoing problems of these situations make survival a challenge for our friends. We might say that in our region, we know what it is to experience bitter waters, to suffer from the contamination of once clean water.

Dust, on the other hand is related to other things. To uncleanliness, as I mentioned previously, but also death. From dust you were made, and to dust you shall return. Dust reminds us of our inherent frailty, of the weakness of our bodies. To these two polarized elements, a third is added. The Priest takes a scroll and writes the words of the curse upon it. Earth elements are involved. The ink is made of a carbon powder which comes from the burning of certain fuels. To the powder is added oil, or gum resin so they form a liquid substance¹⁵. Having written the curse on the scroll, the ink is washed off into the water. Presumably, it is this element which serves to make the water bitter, though perhaps we might understand bitter in a different way – that is, the water makes someone bitter, rather than being bitter itself.

The effect of the water is curious. It has led some to suggest that there is some unmentioned ingredient – an abortion herb or something similar which serves to bring on the prolapsed uterus and the other noted effects. But given a Priestly concern with detail, I am not sure we should pursue this line. Surely such an idea would surface in the Talmud were this the case, but it remains silent on this. In our modern way of thinking, that would also serve to make this ritual an act of murder on an innocent, and I am not sure any of us would want to pursue that way of thinking. So we are left with what, on the surface, appears to be little more than a magic ritual, or a trial by ordeal. People have argued that this is not the case, given that it is assumed at all points that Yhwh reveals the truth of the situation through the use of the ritual, but again, I am not sure we would want to go down that road.

Retrieval

As I mentioned previously, a crucial aspect of the hermeneutic employed in the Earth Bible Commentary is the step of retrieval, where we seek to hear the voice of Earth. In this instance, I position myself with the dust of the floor, and hear her voice.

I am dust. I am you, which is a way of saying you are me. You forget that. You say that I am unclean, forgetting that you too then become unclean. You forget that when you die, you will rejoin me here on the ground, that your life is but a moment. I have received many like you in the past.

You use me as a threat, as a way of frightening this poor woman. You mix me with the holy water, imagining me to be unholy. We don't really belong together, but not because of matters of holiness. Am I profane? Are you profane? You imagine that I defile the water, and defile the woman as she drinks me, but you misunderstand.

People will blame me. But they should blame the fear which you have instilled in the woman. They should really blame you.

Notes

¹ Paul Keating, “Australian Launch of the International Year for the World’s Indigenous People,” <http://australianpolitics.com/1992/12/10/paul-keatings-redfern-speech.html>. Accessed 14th September, 2013.

² According to 2009 Australian Bureau of Statistics data, Aboriginal Australian life expectancy is ten years lower than non-indigenous Australians, instances of diabetes is seven times higher amongst indigenous communities, aborigines are twice as likely to be hospitalised for mental or behavioural disorders, a staggering twenty times more likely to have end stage kidney disorder in some states. Aboriginal children are less likely to finish school, less likely to gain employment, and significantly more vulnerable to incarceration. This represents only a small summary of the overwhelming data available. See, Summary of Australian Indigenous Health, <http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/health-facts/summary>. Accessed 14th September, 2013.

³ The Earth Bible Commentary is a new ecological commentary on the books of the bible published by Sheffield Phoenix Press. It is a development of the work done by the Earth Bible Team (2000-2005). This paper is my first sketching for the Numbers volume which I am preparing.



- ⁴ Norman C. Habel, *The Birth, the Curse and the Greening of Earth: An Ecological Reading of Genesis 1-11*, The Earth Bible Commentary (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011); Norman C. Habel and Peter L. Trudinger, *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, vol. 46, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).
- ⁵ Babylonian Talmud, ed. Rabbi Dr. I Epstein, trans. Rabbi B.D. Klein, *Tractates Nazir-Sotah* (London: Soncino, 1994), 15b.
- ⁶ Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers = [Ba-midbar] : The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, ed. Nahum M. Sarna, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 38.
- ⁷ Ibid., 349.
- ⁸ Elyse Goldstein, *The Women's Torah Commentary: New Insights from Women Rabbis on the 54 weekly Torah Portions* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Pub., 2000).
- ⁹ Talmud, 7b.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ For a characteristically imaginative reading of the silent men in this scene, see Jione Havea, “Numbers,” in *Global Bible Commentary*, ed. Daniel Patte (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 48.
- ¹² Readers are directed here to Nāsili Vaka’uta, “Indicting YHWH,” in *Leviticus-Numbers*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Archie C.C Lee, *Texts@Contexts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013). Vaka’uta reads a different, equally troubling text, but comes to similar conclusions.
- ¹³ See Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “The Strange Case of the Suspected Sotah (Numbers V 11-31),” *Vetus Testamentum* 34, no. 1 (1984); Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20 : A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993); Milgrom, *Numbers = [Ba-midbar] : The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*.
- ¹⁴ Talmud, 15b.
- ¹⁵ André Lemaire, “Writing and Writing Materials,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

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Deuteronomy's 'National Imagination'- YHWH the Landowner as reflecting the Samoan *Pulega a Alii ma Faipule*¹

Samasoni Moleli Introduction

Rev. Samasoni Moleli, BTb (MTC), MTS Distinction (Melbourne) is an Ordained Minister of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa. He is a Lecturer in Old Testament Studies at the Malua Theological College in Samoa.

Deuteronomy's 'national imagination' refers to a re-reading of Deuteronomy as a 'political document'² that offers a new interpretation of Israelite identity and laws in the light of God as their Landowner.

This paper aims to compare Deuteronomy's 'national imagination' of God the Landowner ('Land Treaty')³, to the Samoan notion and practice of *Pulega a Alii ma Faipule* as Village Land-keepers. This paper hopes to address this comparison by using the proposed methodology: Culture and Christianity can co-exist.

This comparison will consider the four concepts under Deuteronomy's National Imagination, and how these concepts may be reflected in Pacific hermeneutics, through the Samoan village context.



1. Centralization

I would like to examine two features of Centralization proposed by Deuteronomy which are different from older legal laws and identity of the Israelites:

- a. Sacrifices and festivals are celebrated in ‘all your settlements’ (*kol misebotecem*) as with the laws in Leviticus 23: 14, 21,31 or at ‘all the places’ (*kol-ha-maqom*) as with the laws in Exo. 20:24. It was common practice for Israel to make sacrifices to God with celebration wherever they settled. Deuteronomy however proposes that their settlement in the ‘promised land’ from YHWH became their very final settlement from all their other settlements. Thus Deuteronomy appears to emphasise ‘the place’ (*ha-maqom*) appointed by God (Deut 12:5-6) their landowner, for their sacrifices and festivals.
- b. The destruction of ‘shrine’ (*bamah-* or ‘high place’) as Samuel did in 1 Sam 9:12-13 or sacred pillar (*matsebah*) as Jacob did in Gen.35: 20. Deuteronomy however, prohibits these shrines and stone pillars. Deut.16.22 ‘Nor shall you set up a stone pillar-things that the Lord your God hates.’

With the above features, we can say that Deuteronomy in this regard presents a new reformed theology (orthodox) with the concept of centralization where Jerusalem is centralized as the only place of worship.⁴

Centralization as we know from our own Pacific societies is not a new concept. For Samoa, the ‘*malaefono*’ or ‘*maota fono*’ or ‘meeting place’ is ‘the central place’ in a village – a place appointed and set aside specifically by the *Pulega Alii ma Faipule* for village gatherings. It is here they gather to *talanoa* and *soalaupule* (talk and discuss) village matters.⁵ In such central gatherings, the ‘*ava* ceremony is first and foremost, as a celebration of thanksgiving where each *matai* before drinking the ‘*ava*’, would pour a *sua-le'a* (a droplet of ‘*ava*’) uttering words of gratitude such as ‘*lau ava lea le Atua*’ (cheers God!). The pouring of *sua-le'a* is of great importance as it symbolises gratitude for the gift of life⁶, and asking God to bless the gathering.

With today’s law of freedom of religion in Samoa, we may find within one village, chiefs from various church backgrounds (such as CCCS, Methodist, Catholic, SDA etc). However, in the village *maota fono*, they come

as one in the name of *Pulega Alii ma Faipule*. This oneness through the *matai* system is believed to define respect within a village. This is being summed up perfectly in one popular song as below :

<i>Pei o Isaraelu mai anamua E iai o latou matai ma e tautua O le ala foi lea e mamalu ai Samoa Aua e leai ni faiga faasoloatoa.</i> ⁷	<i>Like ancient Israel With chiefs and servants This is why Samoa is respectable Because no one is allowed to run wild!</i>
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That is, having village councils that define village *tapuu* (taboos/rules) means as long as one is within the village land, he/she is guided by the village rules for the common good of all.

2. ‘Ancestral Inheritance (nahalah)’:

Ancestors and ancestral inheritance are associated with concepts of sacredness and taboos in the Old Testament including Deuteronomy itself. For instance, in Prov. 22.28⁸ and Deut. 19:14⁹ we find landmarks set up by ancestors for protection of their lands from strangers. The word *elohim* (translated as God or gods) refers to ‘*adonai*’(master/lord) or ‘majestic on lands’ as in Ps.16:2-3, and also refers to ‘deities or ancestors/fathers’ in Gen. 31: 52-54; 46: 1. The story of Naboth’s refusal to give his *nahalah* to Ahab speaks of the land as an inheritance from his *elohim* or ancestors (1Kings 21:2-3).¹⁰

However, Deuteronomy 4:19-20 and 6:4 strongly clarify that ‘*Yhwh* is our *elohim* (God’). Deuteronomy presents Israel a new understanding of their land as a gift from *elohim-Yhwh* through their ancestors, rather than a direct inheritance from *elohim*-ancestors (Deut. 6:10).¹¹

The Samoan *faasinomaga* (identity) is wrapped up in three inter-related forms : *matai title*, *customary land under the matai title*, and the *Samoan language*.¹² The words *eleele* and *palapala* both mean soil or blood; the word *fanua* is translated ‘land’, and is also Samoan for ‘placenta’, where one’s life begins. The burying of the placenta in the land after childbirth signifies the return to the soil of the very blood that formed life. Thus with the parallel in word meanings, we find a close relationship between land and one’s life from the Samoan perspective. *Eleele/palapala* (soil) forms *fanua* (land) and *fanua* (placenta) forms life. Just as



soil forms land, so does blood forms life. One needs his/her attachment to customary land to be a complete Samoan; for without that connection to their land, one is missing an important piece that completes one's Samoan identity.

Customary land is an inheritance from the *aiga* (family) ancestors¹³ and such land is placed under the *pule* (authority) of the *matai* appointed by the extended family, where the *matai* has authority over who lives on it and use it.¹⁴ With the interpretation that a *matai* is a '*atua o lalo nei*', (earthly god) we may then refer to Samoan customary lands as ancestral inheritance under the authority of ancestral gods via the *matai*. The *matai* title carries the ancestors' name throughout generations, and the authority that comes with that name represents the authority from the ancestral gods.¹⁵ Here, we see the two go hand in hand – the name of ancestors and the authority of the gods. But over time, things have changed. There is a popular song today that goes:

Ua tofia e le Atua Samoa ina ia pulea e matai, aua o lona suafa ua vaelua iai' translated as 'Samoa has been sanctioned by God,¹⁶ to be ruled by matai, as it was the matai with whom God's name has been shared.'

'Here in this song, we see the earthly gods in the *matai* definition being replaced by the Christian God. Just as Deuteronomy implies Israel's land being owned by Yhwh rather than an ancestral inheritance, in a similar manner Samoa is also referring to the Christian God as one that gave the *matai* the authority over their land. And somehow Samoa has learnt to accept such an interpretation today, in support of our national motto of *Faavae i le Atua Samoa*' or 'Samoa is founded on God.'

3. 'Limitation on Monarchy' and Blocking on 'Self-congratulations':

Deuteronomy suggests that when Israel enters the land Yhwh gives them and they have a king whom Yhwh would choose (Deut 17:15), the king is not the sacral lawmaker and must not be exalted above other community members.¹⁷ This sets some limitation on the monarchy and emphasises the significance of the community as a whole rather than one key person.

In addition, Deuteronomy also seems to block Israel from self-congratulations when they perceive themselves as a blessed people. First, Deuteronomy prohibits their military ideology that Yhwh chose them because of their vast majority in numbers (Deut. 7:7-8).¹⁸ Second, Deuteronomy prohibits their economic ideology that their wealth was attained through their own hard labour (Deut. 8:17-18).¹⁹ Third, Deuteronomy disapproves of their self-righteousness ideology when they claim that they earn their land occupation through their own righteousness (Deut 9:4-6).²⁰

Thus for Israel, the above limit on monarchy and the forbidden ideologies, reinforce their land claim as a ‘gift from Yhwh’ and was not something from their own efforts. No one among them, not even the king, may in anyway claim glory over their land settlement; it was Yhwh and Yhwh’s dealings alone.

Samoa does not have a monarchy thus we do not have kingdoms but ‘chiefdoms’.²¹ The *Pulega alii ma faipule* is made up of *matai* who are appointed by their *aiga potopoto* (extended families) to be their representative, thus these *matai* carry the approval of their respective *aiga potopoto*.²² With such a communal based structure in place, no one takes any form of self-congratulation because of the strong inter-connectedness among groups involved.

Though the *matai* has the *pule* (authority) over the extended family’s land, he/she cannot exercise this pule without the extended family’s consent, as the land is owned by the extended family as a whole.²³

That is, Samoa’s social structure emphasises groups rather than individuals thus no self-glorification may prevail over the issue of land ownership.

4. Ban (Herem)²⁴

Ban (*herem*) in general is a broad and complicated issue in the Old Testament due to its inconsistencies. For the purpose of this paper, I will briefly suggest some features of *herem* that relate to this argument. Deuteronomy’s understanding of *herem* is different compared to Exo. 23: 27-30 in which *herem* (*garash-* means ‘cast/drive out’; Lev. 18:25-28 -*herem* (*qi’i*) means ‘spue out’ or ‘vomit up’); Josh. 6:21 is the massive killing of everything people and animal, and here *herem* is quite similar to the one in Deut.7:1-3 and 20: 16-17 ‘everything that breathes’ (*kol neshamah*).



An overview from these different biblical texts about *herem*, suggest the development of conquest and war that often abides with laws and conditions to be followed. That is, we see in the above *herem* scenarios the destruction of the non-Israelites people that fight against Israel.

However, Deuteronomy offers a new interpretation on *herem* which suggests that even Israelites who are proven disloyal to Yhwh shall be punished by having their entire town, people and livestock, devoted to the *herem* (ban).²⁵

Like Israel's land granted by God under certain conditions, custodianship of Samoan village land is seen as subjected to *tapu-a-fanua* (land rules/tabooos) set by the *Pulega a alii ma faipule*. If these rules are broken, the *Pulega alii ma faipule* would also decide on the punishment to enforce.²⁶ Different punishments apply depending on the seriousness of the offense. Punishments include *mu le foaga* (burning of ones's property), *ati ma le lau* (complete uprooting from the land or complete removal from the village), *ai ma le teve* (chewing the burning teve root) and others²⁷. Severe punishment where property is burnt down or one is removed from the village involves total clearing of one's belongings from the village land. In such cases, we see that one's offence defiles all his/her belongings, including the village land he/she occupies. So the punishment serves as a means of cleaning up the damage from the village land. Thus just as God sets the *herem* with the intention to keep the land free of defiled acts, this also has been the aim of punishments such as *ati male lau* and *mu le foaga* imposed by *pulega alii ma faipule*.

Conclusion

The concepts of Deuteronomy's national imagination discussed above assist us in understanding not only how the Israelites laws and identity may have been transformed as they prepare to settle in their 'promised land', but also how our own *faaSamoa* (Samoan culture) has learnt to adjust in co-existing with Christianity.

From Deuteronomy's perspective, Yhwh as Israel's Landowner appoints Jerusalem as their central place, overriding the old idea of sacrifices/festivals at every place or at high places. The land is a gift from Yhwh and not an inheritance from their ancestors. The monarchy exists with limitations and the emphasis is placed on equality among community members, with the intention to override any form of selfish ideas that may take away the focus on

Yhwh as their Landowner. And ban is in place to guard the land not only from the non-Israelites, but also Israelites that may disobey Yhwh.

From the Samoan perspective, *Pulega alii ma faipule* is an authoritative body made up of *matai* that keep the village together; the *maotafono* is the center where they come to discuss village matters; they have authority over their extended family land of how it may be used and that authority is passed on to them from their ancestors through the *matai* title; the community based structure emphasises equality among members with the *Pulega alii ma faipule* as leaders; they set rules and punishments in place to promote a calm community.

Like Yhwh's crucial role of Landowner in Israel's settlement in their 'promised land', *Pulega alii ma faipule*'s role as landkeepers is also of utmost important in the Samoan village. Today, although the constitution does not recognise the authority of *Pulega alii ma faipule*, it has not prevented *Pulega Alii ma faipule* from exercising their traditional powers over village matters. *Pulega alii ma faipule* keeps Samoa's three-fold *faasinomaga* (identity) alive – *matai* title, customary land and Samoan language. And in doing so, the culture thrives well alongside Christianity. By reinforcing rules that promote peaceful communities, *Pulega alii ma faipule* are also promoting Christian living.

Food for Thought:

- No doubt that Christianity has introduced changes in our cultures.
Have we gone 'more Christian' that we let go of our cultural identity easily?
- Hasn't communal authority (*pule*) over land lead to many quarrels among relatives nowadays?
- We learned of severe *herem* by God on people's disobedience.
Likewise, we have many severe village punishments that come from *matai* jealousy and envy. How could we redefine punishment yet keep its purpose?



Notes

¹ Refers to 'Village Council'. Also called by Sarasopa Enari 'The Legislative and Jurisdiction panel of the village.'

² Norman Habel, *The Land is Mine; Six Biblical Land Ideologies*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, p. 36.

³ Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. 43.

⁴ Mark Brett, *Decolonizing God; The Bible in the Tides of Empire*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), p. 50-51.

⁵ Fofo Sunia, *Lupe o le Foaga*, (Apia: Fiafia Dwayne Sunia, 2002), p. 54.

⁶ Samoan ava ceremony is very sacred and honoured by the Village council and matai in any gathering (hence the name 'alofisa'). Historically, this ava ceremony has taboos and orders where Pava's son disobeyed (solialofi); he jumped in the alofisa which had led LeTagaloa (Samoan god) to cut him in 2 pieces.

Then Pava cried out to Le Tagaloa to restore his son's life. Pava ordered to collect the two pieces of his son's body and placed them in the alofisa of Le Tagaloa in front of the tanoa for ava ceremony (taulaga). As they were clapping (tapatii) and droplet of ava, all were asking and begging god to restore life on Pava's son. As a result, Le Tagaloa answered by saying 'Ola!' 'Soifua!' and the son alive (see Aiono Fanaafi Le Tagaloa, *O le Faasinomaga*, Alafua: Lamepa Press, 1997), p.15-16.

⁷ By Tuiletufuga Henry Enele.

⁸ Prov. 22:28: *Do not remove the ancient landmark that your ancestors set up.*'

⁹ Deut. 19:14: *You must not move your neighbor's boundary marker, set up by former generations, on the property that will be allotted to you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.*'

¹⁰ Brett, *Decolonizing God*, p. 52-53.

¹¹ Deut. 6:10- *When the Lord your God has brought you into the land that he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you- a line with fine, large cities that you did not build.*'

¹² Aiono Fanaafi Le Tagaloa, *O le Faasinomaga*, (Alafua: Lamepa Press, 1997), p. 4.

¹³ Fanaafi, *O le Faasinomaga*, p. 266.

¹⁴ Malama Meleisea, Lagaga; *A Short History of Western Samoa*, (Suva, Fiji USP: Oceania Printers Ltd, 2003), p. 26.

¹⁵ Malama Meleisea, *Lagaga*, p. 37.

¹⁶ God as used here refers to Christian God.

¹⁷ Deut. 17.20... '*neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment...*'

¹⁸ Deut. 7.7-8 *It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you-for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the Lord has brought you out with mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand Pharaoh, king of Egypt.*'

¹⁹ Deut. 8:17-18- 'Do not say to yourself, *My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.* 18. But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth'.

²⁰ Deut. 9:4-6- 'When the Lord your God thrusts them out before you, do not say to yourself, 'It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to occupy this land; it is rather because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is dispossessing them before you.'

²¹ Fanaafi, *O le Faasiomaga*, p. 268.

²² Sunia, *Lape o le Foaga*, p. 54.

²³ Ron Crocombe & Malama Meleisea (eds.), *Land Issues in the Pacific*. (Suva: Fiji USP, 1994), p. 22.

²⁴ 'Fully devoted by destruction' as stated by W. Brueggemann (see Walter Brueggemann, *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination & Memory*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 79.). Generally means 'ban' or 'exile,' 'excommunication,' 'genocide' (see Mark Brett, *Decolonizing God*, (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), p. 78-90.

²⁵ Deut. 28; 10; 4; 32.

²⁶ Malama Meleisea, *Lagaga*, p. 28.

²⁷ Seiuli Vaifou Aloalii (HoD Samoan Studies NUS)- Interviewed on 26/7/13, 1.40pm.

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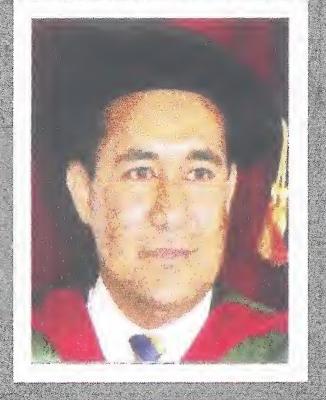
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Celebrating Hybridity in Island Bibles

Jesus, from *Tamaalepo* (son of the dark)
into *Tama'aiga* (son with many families)
in Mataio 1:18-26

Mosese Ma'ilo

Rev. Dr. Mosese Ma'ilo is an ordained Minister of the Methodist Church in Samoa. He holds a PhD in New Testament from Birmingham University, England; and lectures in New Testament studies at the Piula Theological College. He also specializes in sociolinguistic studies of the Bible.

The experimental translation of island Bibles in the 19th century was totally controlled by Western missionaries (esp. London Missionary Society and Wesleyan missionaries)¹. But their superior attitudes towards native tongues were not hegemonic enough to guard what biblical scholars refer to as the ‘originality’ of biblical languages. Hebrew and Greek—with their associated cultural symbols—were not universal enough to remain unaffected when crossing the barriers of language and cultural difference. Missionary translators could not resist the pressure of island (recipient) languages in order to effectively transfer biblical ideas to island readers. Likewise, island languages were fairly limited to fully accommodate biblical ideas. Hence, the cultural politics of ‘difference’ is inescapable in any textual translation, and the Bible is of no exception. A number of examples from island Bibles indicate the ‘ambivalent’ nature of the Bible translation process. The poetics of such Bibles is and remains neither the one (Greek/Hebrew) nor the other (Samoan/Fijian/Tongan etc.). Any claim on either is perhaps untenable.²



Nevertheless, there is a touch of value to be celebrated with island Bibles. As literary productions of imperialism, they could be treated as postcolonial texts. Their introduction, reception, and translation indicate the colonial significations of cultures and languages, based on the notion of ‘difference,’ of otherness. As a result, island Bibles constitute a poetics of imperialism; languages packed with Western oriented Christian culture. The desire of missionary translators was not entirely to translate God’s Word. It has to be a Word with the power to convert, dominate, and re-direct the savage islanders’ moral, spiritual, and cultural consciousness through the power of language, *island Bible languages*. Consequently, island readers were compelled to abandon and demonise their own native dialects, together with their associated symbols and worldviews, in favour of Western and biblical values.

Island Bibles: Neither the one nor the Other

How can we emancipate island readers from the grip of Western ideas, embedded within the conceptual framework of island Bibles? Certainly, retranslation or revision is reasonable. However, postcolonial theory suggests a rather challenging way that both critiques and respects the colonial past. Island Bibles exemplify hybridity—neither the one nor the other. Hence, they become authentic resources for doing island biblical interpretation. Let’s turn to some of the postcolonial suggestions.

Mehrez, a postcolonial literary critic refers to these types of texts (after translation) as hybrids, since they are culturo-linguistic layered.

These postcolonial texts frequently referred to as ‘hybrid’ or ‘métissés’ because of the culturo-linguistic layering which exists within them, have succeeded in forging a new language that defies the very notion of a ‘foreign’ text that can be readily translatable into another language. (Mehrez 1992, 121)

The language of a text after translation is ‘new’ in the sense that it has its own distinctive linguistic and cultural character. While translation has, in a sense, forged a new language, island Bible languages are multi-linguistic and multi-cultural enough to resist the idea of a dominant cultural perception, monopolised by the values of a single culture. Mehrez’ observations of the form and literary nature of these texts is obliging to place some value on

island Bible translations, which are always referred to as merely copies, whose true meanings are controlled by Greek or Hebrew original texts.

In referring to Bible translation, Homi Bhabha (one of the masterminds of postcolonial thinking) points out the ambivalent nature of the translating process. In the mission context, translation relocated the Bible from being an insignia of colonial authority to be a sign of resistance, from a fetish to be a hybrid. Translation, then, allowed the written authority of the Bible to be confronted and defied in the postcolonial context.

The process of translation is the opening up of another contentious political and cultural site at the heart of colonial representation. Here the word of divine authority is deeply flawed by the assertion of the indigenous sign, and in the very practice of domination the language of the master becomes hybrid—neither the one thing nor the other... The written authority of the Bible was challenged and together with it a postenlightenment notion of the ‘evidence of Christianity’ and its historical priority, which was central to evangelical colonialism. (Bhabha 1994, 33-34)

Bhabha’s use of “hybrid” to designate the master’s language after translation points out the possibility of new ways to enliven the dialogue on methods and resources for biblical interpretation. As hybrids, island Bible languages become an unexpected sign of resistance in reading and interpretation. Bhabha argues that if translating the Bible into the *other’s* language has opened up a combative site for colonial representation, it is upon that same political site [for instance, the Tongan, Tahitian, or Samoan Bible] where authoritative readings could be challenged. If it was translation that the Word of divine authority was flawed by the assertion of the indigenous sign, then it is the reassertion of the indigenous sign—the island Bible—where we can indicate and argue against the colonial authority of original Bible languages. Island Bibles represent a language *in-between* that occupies what Bhabha terms the Third Space (Bhabha 1994, 36-37) of negotiation; a space where foreign and local symbols are brought into the harmonious creation of new concepts and meanings.



Island Bibles: Fresh lifeblood of the Christian Manual

From the point of view of cultural translation studies, the language of a translated text is the continued life of a dead text in another life context. Susan Bassnett argues that a translation is

The continued life of a text at another moment in time ...
translation therefore becomes the act that ensures the life of
the text and guarantees its survival ... [A translation] injects
new lifeblood into a text by bringing it to the attention of a new
world of readers in a different language. (Bassnett 1996, 22)

To reread Bassnett's view for our purpose, island Bibles are not merely translations for the sake of translation. They are the continued life of the Greek and Hebrew texts at another moment in time. They ensure the life of the Bible, the manual of Christianity, in island languages and cultures. Island Bibles inject new lifeblood, island lifeblood into dead Hebrew and Greek languages. Island Bibles are texts where the foreign God speaks directly and originally to the real world of island readers, no longer as a foreign God, but as a universal God that speaks in a tongue that is understood by island readers, but remains part of a universal Christian language. Our failure to treat island Bibles as equal authority to the so-called original texts indicate neo-colonial attitudes, where interpreters of original texts or the more sophisticated Western Bibles think, "Thanks to translation, we become aware that our neighbours do not speak and think as we do" (Paz 1992, 154).

The hybrid identities of island Bibles do not signify cultural authority or any claim to language superiority. Their languages "remain perpetually in motion, pursuing errant and unpredictable routes, open to change and reinscription" (McLeod 2000, 219). Biblical studies in our postmodern and postcolonial island contexts need this perpetual movement allowing diverse cultural experiences to pursue unpredictable readings and interpretations. The experiences of island biblical scholars offer alternatives. Taking Island Bibles seriously as God's Word on the same *kerygmatic* calibre (as with the original intention of the Hebrew and Greek texts) may offer a challenge and injects new lifeblood into the future of biblical studies in the islands.

Mataio 1:18-25 - Jesus as *Tamaalepo* in Samoan Bible

Through [Bible] translation, we have in our possession the biblical resources for island biblical interpretation. Below is an application of such theory to a re-reading of Mary's pregnancy narrative in Mataio 1:18-25, Samoan Bible.

Samoan Translation (1887)

¹⁸ Sa faapea ona fanau mai o Iesu Keriso. Sa faufautane lona tina o Maria ia Iosefa, ua iloa ua to o ia i le Agaga Paia, a o lei faatasi i laua. ¹⁹ O Iosefa foi lana tane o le tagata amiotonu ia, e lei loto foi o ia ina faamasiasi ia te ia i luma o tagata, ua ia manatu e faatea lemu ia te ia. ²⁰ A o mananatu o ia i na mea, faauta, ua faaalua mai ia te ia agelu a le Alii i le miti, ua faapea mai, Iosefa e, le atalii o Tavita, aua e te fefe ina aumai ia te oe o Maria lau ava; aua o lana to mai le Agaga Paia lea. ²¹ E fanau mai e ia le tama tane, e te faaigoa foi ia te ia o Iesu; aua e faaola e ia lona nuu ai a latou agasala. ²² Ua oo nei mea uma ina ia taunu ai afioga a le Alii I le perofeta, ua faapea mai, ²³ Faauta, e to le taupou, ma fanau mai le tama tane, latou te faaigoa foi ia te ia o Emanuelu; o lona uiga pe a fa'amatatalaina, Ua ia te I tatou le Atua. ²⁴ Ua ala Iosefa, sa moe, ona faia lea e ia pei ona fai mai ai ia te ia o le agelu a le Alii; ua na aumai lana ava. ²⁵ Ae la te lei feiloa'i ua oo ina fanau mai e ia o lana tama tane ulumatua; ua ia faaigoa foi ia te ia o Iesu.

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¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

A. Translation as Representation

From a translator's point of view, the rendering of Mary's 'pregnancy' (Matthew 1: 18, 20 and 23) in the Samoan Bible reflects one of the pathetic strategies employed in missionary Bible translating in the islands. In most cases, like this one, they opt for simplicity rather than the most appropriate terms available in island tongues. With reference to missionary representations of islanders, the option for simplicity signified how islanders were characterised in missionary writings as simple and stupid; Simple people, simple minds, simple language.

B. Situation of Maria's to (Pregnancy)

Matthew does not directly address the situation of Mary as "pregnant." The direct term (for pregnancy) only appears in Luke 1: 24, with reference to Elizabeth's condition. Instead, Matthew uses an expression which literally means "with child." The weight is on the state of the mother's union with her child, although the "how" did she become pregnant is always present without proper explanation.

Translators of the Samoan Bible render "with child" into *to*,³ which is the simplest and greenest term for pregnancy. They ignored other appropriate and more respectful terms in the Samoan idiom such as *tau'ave le tama*, meaning "to bear about" (Pratt 1911, 297) or "to carry," which best serves Matthew's "with child." The term *ma'itaga* (Pratt 1911, 192: "a confinement") is another respectful term for pregnancy. Nevertheless, our study takes and respects the translator's decision as a hybrid, neither the one nor the other.

Maria was pregnant before she and Iosefa consummated their relationship (Mataio 1: 18). The most appropriate (Samoan) term for such pre-marital pregnancy is *toifale* or *tofale* (Milner 1993, 268), which literally refers to "pregnancy outside of marriage". Such is a "disgrace" and humiliation that a girl brings to her family and thus the child is pronounced illegitimate. Translators avoided *tofale*, perhaps because Maria's situation is exceptional (divine plan?). But the avoidance of *tofale* confuses the poetics of the passage. The content and context of the passage says it is *tofale*, but the term to allows otherwise. Interestingly, to silently leaves the situation opened for Samoan readers to be branded as *tofale* or otherwise. But since the passage has the authority to overrule the meaning of terms, Maria's pregnancy in the Samoan Bible is unfortunately, *tofale*.



C. Maria, the *Taupou* (Virgin) Mother?

In Matthew 1: 23, the rendering of virgin into *taupou*⁴ to designate Maria as sexually pure raises a concern. *Taupou* is a village title, an honorary designation given to a special lady not so much because of virginity, but of status and responsibility. *Taupou* is always the daughter of a village high chief. She is responsible for the maidens of the village and women's organization, the *auluma*. She can or cannot be a virgin, as her status as *taupou* is not to be determined by her virginity, but by her ancestral line.

The use of *taupou* really brings the text to the Samoan socio-political context. It portrays Maria as a responsible and respected woman leader in the Samoan society, rather than a Jewish virgin in the sense of sexual purity. Based on such reference, Maria in the Samoan Bible language can and cannot be a virgin mother. She is a *taupou*, a respected and responsible woman leader. Her title is not based on her sexual purity, but on status and responsibility in a community. This also indicates the richness of hybridity in translation.

a) *The identity of Maria's child in Mataio 1: 18-25*

Maria's premarital pregnancy or *tofale* in Mataio 1: 18-25 means that the child she gives birth to is "fatherless." Andries van Aarde argues for the same identity of Jesus from a psychohistorical portrayal of Joseph. Van Aarde contends that Jesus is fatherless because the Joseph of the gospel writers is an ideal type, and that he never had sex with Mary. By reconstructing the life of Jesus within first century Herodian Palestine, Aarde's ideal typology of Jesus' life indicates that he lived a life of defending fatherless children, patriarch-less women, and other social misfits—like Jesus himself. (van Aarde 2002, 71). His relationship to his family and the leaders of the society within the gospels indicates that Jesus was treated as a fatherless child until God took him as his child.

Mark, the first gospel to be written, makes no reference that Jesus has a father. Jesus is referred to as the carpenter, the son of Mary (Mk. 6: 3). In the Jewish tradition, to call a man the "son of a woman" means that his paternity is questionable. Spong rightly argues on this matter with reference to the early church traditions. "At some point after Christians fought off charges based on the scandal of the cross, they clearly had to fight off charges based on the scandal of the birth" (Spong 1996, 205).



Samoan Bible readers and interpreters know this scandal by reading the Bible in their own tongue. A fatherless child, like Maria's son Jesus, is thus identified as the *tamaalepo* (Milner 1993, 185), a "child of the dark." The child's father is the night, the darkness, which is actually a discreditable social identification. *Tamaalepo* is an illegitimate child because of the mother's "having sex in the dark," a symbolic expression of pregnancy as a result of sex outside of marriage. Not only is the child fatherless, he/she is also a *tamaalepo*, based on the way he/she was born into the family. Following van Aarde's archetypal reconstruction of his fatherless life, Jesus did not enjoy the privileges of a legitimate child with a father at his side. This is in line with a *tamaalepo* in the Samoan society, who is expected to endure the humiliation and disgrace in family and society.

b) *From tamaalepō into tamaaāiga: emancipative interpretation*

Tamaaāiga is a person of large family connections (Pratt 1911, 318).⁵ From a Samoan perspective, Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1: 1-14, narrated before the virgin birth, states that he is a person of large family connections. Jesus is related to the nobilities and fathers of the nation, so he is also a *tamaaāiga*. Jesus was perceived as *tamaalepo* by the members of his society, which means "... being barred from status as child of Abraham, that is, a child of God" (van Aarde 2002, 81). He was treated as such in the gospels. Even his own family (Mtt. 12: 36-50) were standing far from him. He faced Roman persecution, because of his beliefs in how a fatherless child becomes a child of Abraham.

Nevertheless, it is the memory of the faith community, after the resurrection, which transformed the identity of Jesus from *tamaalepo* into *tamaaāiga* based on his life, his teachings, and how he ended his life as a true child of God. The changing identity of Jesus is a result of his victorious death. He died a *tamaalepō* but was raised to become a *tamaaāiga*. When Matthew starts his story of Jesus with a genealogy, it is obviously with the purpose of confirming Jesus' identity as *tamaaāiga*, a person with large family connections, beginning with Abraham, David, and the nobility of the chosen nation.

This reading serves the island community better, by reading from their own Bible. It is an emancipative reading of Mataio 1: 18-25, which hopes to transform island cultural perceptions of *tofale* women like Maria, and the *tamaalepo* or children of the dark like Jesus. Today, although islands are

Christianised, these social humiliations still persist, and result in either young people leaving the family for good, or even suicide.

We, islanders need to come up with sound biblical interpretations that are not only meaningful, but have the power to transform island perceptions of life in the modern world. The way forward is not by absolutizing our island cultural values in biblical interpretations, but by mobilising their transformative aspects with the relevant biblical texts for emancipative reading. That is, reading that helps transform our own oppressive, despotic and patronising perceptions.

Concerns and the Way Forward

The hope of this type of reading is clear: to re-signify island Bibles not only as texts for mission and conversion (as they were used in colonial evangelical mission), but as textual resources for sound and emancipative biblical studies. In every Oceania theological institution, island Bibles are treated as translated copies of the Hebrew or Greek originals. In terms of proper biblical studies, they are never equalised to the authority of original texts [and sometimes the English Versions] simply because they are “translations.” This attitude signpost the ranking of Bibles, which raises a grave concern on categorising the inspired Word of God based on cultural/linguistic difference. Island interpreters (in the academia) are forced to depend on Western commentaries, consensus of (male/white/European) biblical scholars, and European guilds of biblical scholarship for standardised biblical interpretation and methodology.

Island Bibles and Vernacular Biblical Hermeneutics

In *Vernacular Hermeneutics* Sugirtharajah demonstrates three modes of vernacular reading: The conceptual correspondences, the narrative enrichments, and the performantial parallels (1999, 98-105). The first mode “seeks textual or conceptual parallels between Biblical texts and the textual or conceptual traditions of one’s own culture,” looking “beyond the Judaic or Greco-Roman contexts of the biblical narratives, and seeks corresponding conceptual analogies in the reader’s own textual traditions.” The second mode looks at reemploying “popular folk tales, legends, riddles, plays, proverbs and poems that are part of the common heritage of the people, and place them



vividly alongside biblical materials, in order to bring out their hermeneutical implications.” The third mode has to do with the utilization of “ritual and behavioural practices that are commonly available in a culture.” All three modes are about the revitalisation of indigenous texts, cultural, popular, and ritual values. As Sugirtharajah himself acknowledges at the end, there are weaknesses as well as positive implications of formulating vernacular biblical hermeneutics this way.

In my view, most of the problems in island biblical hermeneutics so far are related to the question, “Where do we locate culture or native traditions in the hermeneutical activity?” In building on both the negative and positive sides, I suggest that the limitation we encounter is based on the fact that we “locate” culture as the source of the interpretative conflict rather than as the effect of discriminatory practises (Bhabha 1994, 114). Cultural difference is not the problem, because it was a strategy of inscribing power, control, and authority in the colonial mission context (Bhabha 1994, 114). It means biblical hermeneutics should not be an exercise of recovering island cultural identity. Cultural difference was and is still not the problem. The problem is when other interpretations, worldviews, and cultural perceptions of reality tend to be the absolute, by devaluing other people’s readings and experiences. Relocating culture as the source of conflict in biblical interpretation implies that we, island readers, are reinscribing discriminating practices that we seriously tend to subscribe.

Island biblical hermeneutics has to kick start by acknowledging which Bible “telling” or Bible language we are reading from. It is not about the absolutization of our island Bibles as a mark of identity, but of acknowledging and celebrating their hybridity, neither the one nor the other. The idea is to take the hybridity of island Bible languages as a site of resistant (to the dominant readings) biblical interpretation. It is “biblical” in terms of respecting the poetics of island Bibles as Bibles, where cultural variables are to be re-signified as “referents” whether they are conceptual correspondences, narrative enrichments, or performantial parallels.

While cultural or native elements are treated as referents, island biblical hermeneutics is in a position to avoid the absolutization of island cultures. Sugirtharajah cautioned:

At a time when vernacular cultures and languages are intermingled with those of the metropolis, it is not always feasible to use dialect as a test of identity. In our enthusiasm to recover the native, we may put ourselves in the double predicament of finding redeeming values both in the indigene and in the text... By eulogizing the ascendancy of the native and revalorising the text, we may end up by fixing, absolutizing and immobilizing both.

(Sugirtharajah 1999, 15)

It would be naïve if the purpose of island biblical hermeneutics is to eulogize the native and her/his cultural values as absolute. I would rather be confident if the purpose of island hermeneutics is to “uncover” island presence in a postmodern and postcolonial world. In that sense, island biblical hermeneutics indirectly presents the native’s presence as dynamism in biblical interpretation. Island interpretative capabilities have long been overshadowed and marginalized by dominant Western, Latin American, African and Asian worldviews. Island hermeneutics re-signifies island readers’ presence, voices, and memories in biblical interpretation.

The point is that island biblical hermeneutics must focus on the present reality of their own Bible’s linguistic and cultural hybridity. There is a difference between recovering the islander’s culture and recovering the islander as a hybrid cultural being. The former is perhaps plausible if any pure indigenous culture still exists. The latter re-signifies our experiences, memory, and presence as not culturally exclusive. Therefore, island biblical hermeneutics must take the native Bible seriously. This should not be based on island Bible languages as mark of indigenous identity, but of their hybridity. Starting with island Bible languages also builds the confidence of island readers to express their biblical expositions based on how they read the Bible in a familiar tongue. At the same time, we are also aware that such interpretation is part of a global biblical dialogue, where nothing is lost, but gained in translation.

Notes

¹ Oceania Bibles were produced during the era of British and European imperial expansion in the South Seas and all over the world. Missionary translators were agents of such imperial expansion in terms of exporting Victorian Christianity.

² The ambivalence of native Bible languages does not mean that indigenous Bibles did not accomplish the desire for Christian religious univocity or the movement towards planting Christianity in Oceania. It was indeed accomplished, but just like the ambivalence of cultural representation, it was an achievement within the ambivalence of mimicry, a type of Christianity that was neither completely Western nor totally indigenous. It was universal Christianity not in terms of sameness or difference, but in terms of hybridity, an offshoot of both Western Christianity and Oceania indigenous religious and cultural experiences.

³ George Pratt (1911) defines to as “with child” in the Samoan-English part of his Dictionary. In the English-Samoan part of the same Dictionary, “pregnant” is defined as to, with alo as the respective term for a chief’s wife. Pratt is actually playing with words here, to comply with their uses in the Bible. G.B. Milner defines to as “be pregnant, pregnancy” (1993).

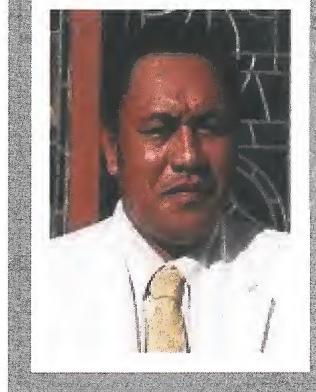
⁴ George Pratt (1911, 303) translates this ‘title’ distastefully as ‘a virgin’. But Milner defines taupou appropriately as “title of village maiden (a position held according to Samoan custom by a virgin singled out for her charm, looks, and manners. Among her duties is the preparation of kava ...” (Milner 1993, 255; see also Kramer 1994, 34-37).

⁵ *Tamaāīga* refers to the paramount chiefs of the Samoan society. There is tradition that most *Tamaāīga* were initially *tamaalepō* or children of the dark.

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Exploring discipleship in Matthew 4:12-25 from *tautua i le va* (service/servant/serve in-between).



This paper will show that Jesus' relationship to the crowd demonstrates Jesus' localization of discipleship¹ and as such it reveals discipleship's primary attention given to the needs and rights of local people. The definition of discipleship upon which that interpretation will be based is that 'discipleship is the self-understanding of a Christian believer relative to his/her own experience of that understanding'.² It is a consideration of discipleship beyond its traditional characteristics of following Jesus as portrayed in the historical master-disciples relationship. It will reveal the following features of localization of discipleship according to the Matthean presentation of Jesus' ministry. First, it is a ministry that begins in a local context. Second, it is a ministry initiated by Jesus. Third, it requires submission and commitment to the authority of Jesus. And fourth, it forms a local voluntary association that Jesus Christ leads.

Vaitusi Nofoaiga
Rev. Vaitusi Nofoaiga is an ordained minister of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa. He is currently a PhD candidate of the University of Auckland studying New Testament. He was a New Testament Lecturer at the Malua Theological College in Samoa.

1. Proposed Reading³

This reading utilises a hermeneutic to see the text and is informed by Homi Bhabha's explanation of the concept 'hybridity'. Analysing the text from that hermeneutic uses three of the five stages of Vernon K. Robbins' socio-rhetorical approach; 'innertexture, intertexture, and social and cultural texture.'⁴

1.1 Hermeneutic

Hybridity is defined by Bhabha as a mixture of identity or culture in a 'third space' in which colonized people respond to colonial rule. He writes:

"These 'in-between spaces' provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself."⁵

Hybridity as a mixture of identity has its problems. For example, hybridity as a cultural identity fails to preserve what is purely traditional. From the point of view of vying for survival in today's world, I consider that weakness, strength. It presents the unpredictability of what really is happening to a particular reader in a particular situation. In that sense, hybridity defines my Samoan situation as the reader and one that will be employed as a hermeneutic to explore discipleship in Matthew 4:12-25.

The desire to revisit the subject of discipleship in Matthew's gospel came from hearing concerns in the Samoan community about the role of the church in considering the needs and rights of the local people.⁶ I see those concerns from my understanding of *faaSamoa*'s (Samoan culture), and Jesus proclamation of ἡβασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν's⁷ consideration of the needs of local people. From my understanding of *faaSamoa*, the egalitarian sharing of the *tautua* (service) roles in between family and community members gives first priority to the needs and rights of local family members. Likewise as shown in the Matthean gospel, Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom begins as a locally-focussed mission where Jesus is narrated helping different people from the crowd in various and different spaces of the world encoded in the text. That hybrid understanding contradicts the one-dimensional focus of global discipleship drawing me into a third space, I call, *va tautua* (space of service/of a servant/to serve).



Tautua as a concept has two significant functions. First, it identifies the servant status and role of the untitled men in the Samoan chiefly system. Second, it expresses serving the family as a moral and ideal value. Both functions describe my being a *tautua* in the third space. It shows that being in a status is not to impose authority held by that status, but to lead and serve the family and community. *Va* is the Samoan word for the space in-between two or more parties. Thus, *va tautua* is an intervening space I locate myself as a reader claiming ‘egalitarianism’ as a critical element in “being in the beyond”⁸ and in “dwell(ing) in the beyond” where I will redescribe and revisit discipleship in the present.

Egalitarianism as equality seems like a straight-forward event. However, in reality, it is not; it is in fact a complex phenomenon.⁹ For this paper, the egalitarianism I would like to emphasize is morally and ethically based and determined by the meaning and undertaking of *tautua i le va*. This type will be clarified by the meaning of the Samoan words that form the phrase *tautua i le va*. The word *tautua* describes an act of service undertaken with a sense of responsibility. The word, *i le*, is a preposition and it points to the place where *tautua* is to be undertaken, which is *va* (space). This space designates distinction of statuses in social and cultural hierarchies in *faaSamoa* such as the *matai* system.¹⁰

In this paper, I look at *tautua i le va* beyond that meaning. First, it signifies not just the space in-between people but also the space in-between places, spaces and times. Second, it is not just a space to carry out certain expected roles but also the space to think of ways to make those roles relevant to the reality of the world encountered by local people. It is one’s making a sense of belonging appropriate to one’s survival in the present world. It is not nullifying the traditional values and beliefs but transforming them into ways that would improve one’s life situation in a local space. It is where being in a position of status is undertaking the role of service in conjunction with the needs and rights of every other person involved in a hierarchy. It does not eliminate the elevation provided by status but demonstrates the actuality of having status, which is to lead and serve others with respect and humility.

In that sense, *tautua i le va* brings forth the following categories that will inform the reading of the Matthean text. First is *faasinomaga faatautua i le va* (a *tautua*’s designation to an in-between space). Such a designation needs *tofa*¹¹



(wisdom) to know and understand how to negotiate the various understandings and values that shape the world a *tautua* inhabits. It is *tofa* that dwells within the *tuao'i* (boundaries) of status, places, spaces and times. *Tuao'i* is the short form of the Samoan phrase '*tua atu o i'* which means 'beyond this point.'¹² It expresses the expectation that no authority is to go beyond designated boundaries of lands, places, spaces, and statuses. Thus, *tofa*, is knowing how to negotiate different understandings and values with respect to their *tuao'i*. *Faasinomaga faatautua i le va* evokes the next category which is *loto fuatiaifo*¹³ *faatautua i le va* (subjectivity to be a servant). It is a *tautua*'s desire to search for ways to help others, to lead, and to serve. It is a *tautua*'s sacrifice to the people and places to which he/she belongs. In this way, *tautua i le va* is the hermeneutic that will inform the analysis of the text.

1.2 How hermeneutic informs analysis

In the following ways, the hermeneutic of *tautua i le va* will see the Matthean presentation of Jesus' relationship to the crowd¹⁴ in 4:12-25 as showing discipleship's attending to the needs and rights of local people of Galilee according to the world encoded in the text. First, Jesus' *faasinomaga faatautua i le va* comes from the consideration of Jesus as having mixed identities. According to Mathew's gospel, Jesus is the Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham (1:1) and Son of God (3:17). Jesus' identity as the Son of God locates him in the space of Ἰβασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν. Jesus as Jew reveals another identity of Jesus. However, his proclamation of a new belief system which he claims to be the fulfilment of God's plan of salvation places Jesus in a different space from his fellow Jews and the crowds – the in-between space. It takes him to the hybrid space of a new vision where he will speak in a new language of Israel's relationship to God.¹⁵ And Jesus' location in that space is regarded in this interpretation as the Servant of God - a *Tautua*. Jesus' *faasinomaga faatautua i le va* as Servant has evoked for him his *loto fuatiaifo faatautuato* search in Galilee for those in need and to help them.

Second is the crowd's *faasinomaga faatautua i le va*. The crowd's ambivalent character¹⁶ will be seen as a character located in between their designation as local people of Galilee and their willingness to seek in Jesus' space help for their needs. Their following Jesus and positive responses to Jesus' ministry will be considered as their *loto fuatiaifo faatautua*.



Thus, the focuses of the analysis will be: One, analysing the inner texture is exploring how the language, narration and progression of the text communicate Jesus' dwelling in Galilee as showing the local spatial setting of the beginning of Jesus' ministry. It will be analysed as part of Jesus' *faasinomaga faatautua i le va* revealing Jesus' *tautua* role from the third space, in between his being Son of God and earthly Messiah. It will demonstrate Jesus' *loto fuatiaifo faatautuato* search, call, lead, and help the need in Galilee. Two, the analysis of the intertexture of the text will show the Matthean recitation of Isaiah 9:1-2 in 4:14-15 as a saying chreia affirming the locality of Jesus ministry in Galilee. The final part of the analysis is the social and cultural analysis of the text where the social and cultural nature of the text will be explored revealing Jesus consideration of the needs and rights of the local people of Galilee as reversal of honour. It is Jesus' *loto fuatiaifo faatautuato* deal with the needs of the local family members by using the first Mediterranean social and cultural values in light of the household system of God. Those values are challenge-response, patron-client relationship, and brotherhood.

2. Analysis of the text

2.1 Analysis of the innertexture

2.1.1 Matthew 4:12-25 as a rhetorical unit

The analysis of 4:12-25, as a rhetorical unit¹⁷ in which Jesus' relationship to the crowd is revealed. It is based on the following threefold structure.

- i. Beginning (vv. 12-16): Jesus as *tautua* making his home in Galilee, the home of the first members of the crowd
- ii. Middle (vv. 17-22): Jesus' serving of the needs of the first members of the crowd
- iii. End (vv. 23-25): Jesus' serving the needs of the rest of the members of the crowd from Galilee

The analysis of 4:12-25, as a rhetorical unit in relation to Jesus' relationship to the crowd is revealed in the opening and closing signs shown below of this so-called prologue to Jesus' ministry which could be interpreted as an inclusio.¹⁸ This interpretation is made in the sense that those signs draw the



attention of the hearer/reader to Galilee as the main rhetorical space of the first activities of Jesus' *tautua* ministry in this part of the story. The opening signs of the rhetorical unit are shown in verse 12: Ἐκούσας δὲ δὲ Ἰωάννης παρεδόθη ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν (Having heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee). They are: first, the conjunction δὲ indicates a rhetorical shift from the previous events (Jesus' baptism and temptation) to the next event (Jesus' withdrawal to Galilee). Second, verse twelve's connection to the previous activities identifies Jesus as the main rhetorical character making known that rhetorical transition. And third, Galilee as the place where Jesus moves to, points out Galilee as the rhetorical space where the audience of the first *tautua* activities of Jesus' ministry emerge. The closing signs of the unit are revealed in these words of verse twenty five: καὶ ἡκολούθησαν αὐτῷ ὅχλοι πολλοὶ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας (And great crowd from Galilee followed him.) They are, first, καὶ indicates that the unit is coming to a conclusion. Second, the following of the great crowds come in conjunction with the mention of Galilee in the opening of the unit (v. 12) and forms the rhetorical frame that surrounds the presentation of the beginning activities of Jesus' *tautua* ministry in this part of the Matthean gospel.

2.1.2 Narrative analysis of the rhetorical unit

The beginning of the unit (vv. 12-16) embodies the local time and place of the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the local spatial setting of where the first activities of Jesus' relationship to the crowd will take place. The words, Ἐκούσας δὲ δὲ Ἰωάννης παρεδόθη (Having heard that John had been arrested v. 12) indicate the time of Jesus' withdrawal to Galilee to begin his ministry. It is not explicitly mentioned in the story the exact time or day that John was arrested in order to accurately show the time of the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Rather, John's arrest indicates that John's involvement in this part of the story comes to an end in order to make way for Jesus' ministry. It shows Jesus' *loto fuatiaifo faatautua* to make a home in the place he is expected to go to according to the prophecy of Isaiah (vv. 14-15) in order to fulfil his role as earthly Messiah. It marks the beginning of his initiating of discipleship undertaken in the local space of Galilee. Jesus' withdrawal to Galilee when John was arrested also reflects an involvement of political power as John's arrest may have influenced Jesus' decision to move to Galilee. That power is the Roman empire. Thus, Galilee



as the local and common-place where Jesus' ministry begins is “the place of light”¹⁹ and as such it is a very important place in this part of Jesus' ministry.

The middle part of the unit (vv. 17-22) exhibits Jesus' relationship to the first explicitly designated members of the crowd from Galilee revealing the message of Jesus' *tautua* ministry and its beginning. Ἀπὸ τότε (From that time/then) in verse 17 signals the time that Jesus begins his proclamation of God's kingdom. It is when Jesus made his home in Capernaum. Ἀπὸ τότε also indicates the beginning of the next event which is Jesus' proclamation of the βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. This shows Jesus' responsibility for taking the message of ἡβασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν to the public space. Jesus' movement is now changed from dwelling to going out to the public. It shows that he as Son of God has made himself part of Galilee by going to where the people are – the people in need. This is a dangerous move considering the Roman imperial power that is ruling Galilee as reflected in the arrest of John the Baptist. However, Jesus' proclamation of ἡβασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν in this time without fear reveals his desire as God's servant to begin undertaking his responsibility as a *tautua* not only to the people of Galilee but also to God. Jesus as the Son of God is not using his divine power but carries out his task as a servant in light of the reality of the human world in which he is dwelling. His first announcement of the message of his mission in this stage simply raises a challenge to all those who can hear it.

Matthew's use of ἤρξατο (began), an aorist middle verb, to describe Jesus' beginning of his ministry is important. The middle voice indicates the subject of the verb acting upon itself. Thus, Matthew's telling and showing of Jesus first announcement of his ministry in 4:17, reveals Jesus as the agent of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν on earth. It implies that Jesus will take upon himself the responsibility of proclaiming that βασιλεία. The imperative sense of the proclamation indicates that Jesus has the authority to make that command. Jesus as the agent of ἡβασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, as revealed in the use of the aorist middle tense, shows that in and through him, repentance is guaranteed to make a person become a member of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. In other words, a local person will belong to the local space of Galilee, and more importantly to the space of the kingdom of God, in and through Jesus. The connection of this part of the unit (4:17-22) to the first part (4:12-16) shows the people Jesus appeals to for repentance as those mentioned in 4:15-16 as



people sitting in darkness and the shadow of death - the Galilee of Gentiles. In this way, calling people to repent is bringing the people of Galilee into ἡβασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

Verses 18-22 then begin to show how Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom becomes the light that is shined upon the people sitting in darkness, and how they are considered to have seen a great light. This is reflected in the language and tenses used in this part of the text. The conjunction δὲ in verse 18 indicates that the event in vv. 18-22 is part of Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom in verse 17. It indicates a contrast between proclaiming ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν in words in v. 17, and in actions as shown in vv. 18-22. It also points out a continuation in Jesus' carrying out the proclamation of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. Περιπατῶν (Having walked), a verbal adjective in verse 18 indicates that Jesus' walk by the sea is a description of the proclamation of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν mentioned in verse 17. In that sense, Jesus' *loto fuatiaifo faatautua i le va* to walk beside the Sea of Galilee is not just a walk. It is actually a proclamation of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. As such, the immediate response of the four fishermen to Jesus' command to follow is not a surprising event. It is a reaction to Jesus' proclamation of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν near the sea. It implies that the fishermen listen and understand Jesus' ministry which make them leave their families and follow Jesus. The verb ἀφέντες (having left) as aorist participle is used as a verbal adjective describing the immediate response of the four fishermen to Jesus' calling – the fishermen's subjectivity.

The conjunction καὶ which begins verse 23, links the end part of the unit (vv. 23-25) to the previous parts showing the ongoing development of the crowd's character mentioned in 4:25. Verses 23-25 show that after Jesus calls the four fishermen he then goes throughout Galilee proclaiming ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν in teaching, preaching, and healing. Matthew's use of περιῆγεν as imperfect tense²⁰ demonstrates a repeated action of teaching, preaching and healing throughout Galilee, suggesting that Jesus travelled throughout Galilee not once but twice or more.

2.2 *Analysis of the intertexture*

The Matthean recitation of Isaiah 9:1-2 affirms that Jesus is the person undertaking the *tautua* ministry in Galilee, and Galilee is the local place where that ministry begins.

2.2.1 Matthean recitation of Isaiah 9:1-2

Isaiah 9:1-2 (NRSV)

1a But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

2b The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined

Matthew 4:15-16 (NRSV)

15 "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of Gentiles –

16 the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." (4:15-16)

What we find in Matt 4:15-16 is a recitation of Isaiah 9:1-2 where verse 15 shows the omission of some words of Isaiah 9:1 and verse 16 is nearly a verbatim repetition of Isaiah 9:2. The Matthean replication of Isaiah 9:1 recites only the words that describe the location of the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali. The Matthean recitation of Isaiah 9:2 changes the words ‘walked in darkness’ to ‘sat in darkness,’ and ‘those who lived in a land of deep darkness’ to ‘those who sat in the region and shadow of death.’ The Matthean change of ‘walk’ to ‘sit’ in this recitation is interpreted as having a significant literary link to Jesus walk by the sea in verse 18. It expresses and pictures the contrast between those who sit in darkness, and the walk of Jesus. Thus, Jesus walk is regarded as the walk of light. As such, getting out of sitting in darkness and the shadow of death is transformation to walk in the light, the walk of Jesus. In other words, getting out of sitting in darkness is not the sole responsibility of Jesus. Jesus helps them come out but it is they who do the walk. In doing so, Jesus’ proclamation of God’s kingdom, in verse 17, reveals that repentance is the way to walk in that light.

In the text (4:12-25) the narrator attributes the prophecy to Isaiah (4:14). It affirms that Jesus as the Son of God belongs to the local place of Galilee. As such, it also affirms that Jesus focus of his *tautua* ministry in this part of the story is certainly the people of Galilee. The attribution to Isaiah draws the Matthean audience into the work of the prophet Isaiah in order to assist the hearers and readers to understand the reason why Jesus withdraws to Capernaum. The recitation helps make clear the function of verses 12-16 as the beginning of 4:12-25 as a rhetorical and narrative unit, where Isaiah 9:1-2 is presented as a saying chreia.²¹ Chreia is a statement attributed to someone with authority. Isaiah is a prophet with authority. According to Isaiah 6:1-13, Isaiah was sent by God as his messenger when king Uzziah died which is the time king Ahaz came to power as king of Judah, to tell the people of Judah and Israel of God's displeasure at their disobedience (Isaiah 7:1-8:22). Such description shows Isaiah as a prophet with authority. As such, the Matthean use of Isaiah's prophecies brings authority to the presentation of Jesus as the Messiah.

Isaiah's authority as prophet draws the attention of the hearer/reader to Jesus' dwelling in Galilee. Isaiah 9:1-2 is part of the conclusion of the unit Isaiah 6:1-9;7,²² where hope of salvation is announced to the people of Israel and Judah after their encounter with disasters. The disasters are the result of Israel's and Judah's disobedience to God's command (7:1-8:22). Isaiah delivers God's message to Israel and Judah not to make allies with neighbouring nations such as Assyria. They disobey, which results in Isaiah's deliverance of a message of condemnation. That message ends with words of hope (9:1-7) showing that after all the disobedience of Judah and Israel, God's mercy and love upon the people of Israel continues. The lands of Zebulun and Naphtali described in Isaiah 9:1-2, as the lands of darkness and the shadow of death, were part of God's condemnation of Israel and Judah. But Jesus making his home in Galilee implies that Jesus will be the light that has dawned upon the people of Galilee in that darkness and shadow of death.

2.3 *Social and cultural analysis*

The analysis of the social and cultural texture will show how the social and cultural nature of 4:12-25 as a text reveals Jesus' relationship to the crowd in Galilee in terms of Jesus' giving primary attention to the local social and

cultural needs and rights of the Galileans. It will show that such recognition of needs and rights is reversal of honour from the first century Mediterranean world's social and cultural system of 'honour and shame', to 'honour and shame' in God's system shown in Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom. The social and cultural value of honour and shame, as pivotal values of antiquity influenced how the people in the first century Mediterranean world related to each other socially and culturally.²³

Jesus is presented as a person with ascribed honour in the Matthean story.²⁴ But, the problem with Jesus' ascribed honour is that it is not recognized by people. In the first century Mediterranean social and cultural world, one's honour became convincing and acceptable when acknowledged and recognized publicly.²⁵ Thus, in order for Jesus' ascribed honour to affect the establishment of God's kingdom on earth, it had to become an acquired honour as well. In doing so, Jesus had to publicly demonstrate his authority to undertake that mission. It was Jesus' *loto fuatiaifo faatautua i le va* to deal with the needs and rights of local people. And it was undertaken as a challenge-response.

According to the social and cultural world of the first century Mediterranean, one way of claiming honour is shown in the social communication of challenge-response in public.²⁶ It is where "messages are transferred from a source (challenger) to a receiver."²⁷ The narrator shows that after Jesus' dwelling in Galilee (4:12-16) Jesus makes a public appeal for repentance, as a challenge to the people of Galilee, as the way to claim or acquire the honour of becoming a member of the household of God. Because Jesus as *tautua* is characterised as a competent speaker the message of God's kingdom he proclaims is very important. The challenge is delivered in a deliberative language with an epideictic sense revealing that the people who repent are those who will receive honour and those who do not repent will obtain no honour. It is in the form of a command and is presented as an enthymeme.²⁸ Μετανοεῖτε· ἥγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. (Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.) The major premise of this enthymeme in a construction of a rhetorical syllogism is, 'ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν is here'. The implication of the presence of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν on earth is that it is here for everyone. This part is omitted. However, in order for this enthymeme to make more sense, the major premise needs to

be ascertained. Thus, the minor premise which is ‘repent’ is the support reason that states why the announcement of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν needs to be made. That is, there is too much sin. This means that the whole announcement is actually the conclusion of an apparent syllogism which is ‘those who repent will become members of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.’ Presenting this challenge as an enthymeme is important. It points out in an emphatic and explicit way the purpose of Jesus’ *tautua* ministry which is a ministry to give the oppressed and those in need a way to obtain honour.

An example of a kind of response expected to that challenge is shown in the response of the fishermen in 4:18-22. The fishermen as brothers rise to the challenge immediately by leaving their nets, boat and father and following Jesus.²⁹ The fishermen’s response reveals followers of Jesus’ receiving of God’s honour. The status of fishermen in the first-century Mediterranean is a debatable subject but I will emphasise their status reflected in the tools they use as told and shown in the text.³⁰ It will show how they belong to the social, cultural, political and economic world of Galilee. Their use of nets and boats shows that the first set of brothers was commercial fishermen.³¹ As commercial fishermen in the first-century Mediterranean world, they paid taxes which made them come under the control of the Roman imperial system where power was held by the Emperor and his government. Also as commercial fishermen, they supplied stores in other cities and places, which sometimes were linked in patron-client relationships where the fishermen became the clients and someone in a recognized status in the political government became the patron. As such, despite the fishermen catching more fish, they were not able to reach the status of honour ascribed and acquired by those in power, some of whom were patrons. These ways placed fishermen in the value of shame.³² It was their space of belonging – a space where they carried out their *tautua* to their families.

The next set of brothers is shown sitting mending their nets with their father. The tools they use represent fishing as a family affair. The appearance of the father represents the patriarchal system³³ not at the wider social level but at the level of a family unit where the father is considered the head of the family. It reveals the father as the person in the place of honour in the family who has authority over the nets, boats and the fishermen. It implies that one of the functions of the fishermen in the story is a representation of the family



which includes women and children. The appearance together of these two sets of brothers suggests how the patriarchal system controlled and ran all levels of the social and cultural world of first-century Mediterranean society.

But, Jesus' calling of these fishermen is interpreted as showing a reversal of the patron-client relationship³⁴ where God in and through Jesus' calling is the patron and the fishermen with their families are the clients. In this way, Jesus' calling of the fishermen to follow expresses and pictures God's calling of these brothers with their families to leave the oppressive and colonial social and cultural systems which have been ignoring their needs and rights. Their positive response implies their entering into the third space – the space of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν that will make them seek ways to help ameliorate their family situations. Identifying this group of followers of Jesus as the Matthean community in light of the social nature of early Christianity continues to be a debatable topic in Matthew's studies.³⁵

From the perspective of *tautua i le va*, Matthew's community as brotherhood is reflected in the language of the text. Brotherhood as a voluntary association in the first-century Mediterranean world was an egalitarian group³⁶ made up of various and different people regardless of gender and status.³⁷ One of its roles was to help the people in local communities such as those who had just arrived in the city, to settle into city life. According to Duling, the formation of that group is reflected in the features of “brotherhood” language, related disciplinary processes and scribal leadership.”³⁸

I consider Jesus' calling of the four brothers, to be the formation of a brotherhood voluntary association in light of the household of God. This consideration is based on regarding God as the Father or Head of that household. As such, Jesus as Servant of God's walk near the sea and seeing the fishermen, and going throughout Galilee and healing all the sick are all examples of Jesus bringing the local people of Galilee into brotherhood. It is exemplifying discipleship giving attention firstly to the needs and rights of the local people in Galilee.

According to the narrator, Jesus calls the fishermen to be fishers of people. Considering fishing as the main source of income for the fishermen to help their families, their abandoning of their families without return to fish for people is not compelling and it is a gap in the story. However, interpreting the fishermen's leaving their families and following Jesus to make better their

families' local social, cultural and economic situations, therefore, Jesus' calling of the four brothers in this part of the story, can be looked upon as a calling not only to find better ways to help their families, but to find local people to form the brotherhood association that will carry out helping others in the local community of Galilee.³⁹ As such, brotherhood as undertakers of God's mission is a local affair and is particularly organized to help the local people.

Thus, the brothers' leaving the nets, boats and father indicate abandoning the patron-client relationship and patriarchal system they have been becoming part of, in order to become members of the brotherhood association. Becoming a member of the brotherhood group is entering into the patron-client relationship that is based on God. It is a patron-client relationship in which Jesus is considered the broker in between God as the patron and the people of Galilee as the clients. In this manner, each and everyone from Galilee who responds positively to Jesus' ministry has the opportunity to gain honour of ἡβασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

In verses 23-25, the narrator tells and shows how that brotherhood task is to be undertaken which is in and through the teaching, preaching and practicing of the proclamation of ἡβασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. The sick are considered the people who are socially and religiously unclean indicating the failure of the social, cultural and religious systems in Galilee to recognize their needs and rights. However, Jesus' healing of their sickness goes beyond the physical remedy of the body. It is holistic healing of the whole person; the healing of the body, mind, soul and spirit.⁴⁰ Jesus' healing therefore definitely reveals Jesus' giving attention firstly to these people – people from Galilee.

Conclusion

The analysis from the eye of *tautua i le va* has shown how the textures of 4:12-25 reveal Jesus' relationship to the crowd in Galilee as showing discipleship as a mission that gives attention firstly to the needs of the local people. It reveals that the language, narration and progression of 4:12-25 as a rhetorical and narrative unit show the locality of Jesus' ministry in this part of the story in Galilee. The recitation of Isaiah 9:1-2 affirms that local purpose of Jesus' ministry. According to the analysis, despite the diverse local situations encountered by different members of the crowd from Galilee Jesus was able to help them all by not imposing his authority as Son of God but by helping them



as Servant of God. The analysis of the social and cultural texture consolidates the locality of that ministry by showing how the social and cultural nature of the text communicates Jesus' challenging of the local Galileans with the ways of God that will enable them to obtain honour in the reality of the world they are encountering. It is Jesus' challenge from *tautua i le va*, as a Servant of God in-between his being the Son of God and earthly Messiah to help them make decisions that would improve their local situations. For example, instead of giving the fishermen what they need, Jesus says to them to follow. It is giving the fishermen the responsibility to make decisions they feel are relevant to their local situations. According to the analysis, it is impossible for those fishermen whom their families rely upon for survival to leave their families and follow Jesus without return. Their forming a brotherhood as a reason for leaving their families has some sense when 'fishing for people', which Jesus has talked about is interpreted as forming that voluntary association. Thus, Jesus' exemplifying of discipleship in this text, 4:12-25, shows discipleship as a mission that considers firstly the needs and rights of the local people.

Notes

¹ This tradition focuses mainly on the global-emphasised view of discipleship which is 'go and make disciples of all nations.' But, that focus simply overlooks another significant role of discipleship that is revealed in the Matthean text. That is, 'discipleship as a global mission considers firstly the needs and rights of local people.'

² Fernando F. Segovia, "Introduction: Call and Discipleship – Toward a Re-examination of the Shape and Character of Christian Existence in the New Testament," in *Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 2. See also Michael J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel: As Reflected in the Use of the Term Μαθητης* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 2.

³ Major studies of discipleship in the gospels which used the traditional methods of interpretation (historical and literary criticisms) have shown the global one-dimensionality of discipleship as the underlying point of view of their interpretations, upholding two traditional interpretations of becoming a disciple. 'It is a calling to leave families and go on a mission to the world. It is a calling for men only.' These mandates designate discipleship as a globally-assigned task to be undertaken only by a certain group of 'chosen people. Some examples are: First, Martin Hengel used historical criticism to study the historical Jesus and the nature of discipleship in the Christian religion. (Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and his Followers*, (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1981)). Second, Gerd Theissen's study from a socio-

historical approach utilizing structural functionalism emphasizes the global view of leaving home as a commitment to undertaking discipleship. (Gerd Theissen, "Itinerant Radicalism: The Tradition of Jesus' Sayings from the Perspective of the Sociology of Literature", *Radical Religion*, 2 (1975): 84-93). Third, Stephen Barton from a historical approach interprets the 'call' stories in Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 1:16-20 as the disciples' commitment to Jesus over their own social and cultural world. Barton illuminates that point with reference to Matthew's gospel by saying, "The in-breaking of the kingdom of heaven and the call to follow Jesus establish priorities which transcend the mundane obligations of occupation and family life." (Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 23-56). Traditional interpretations of discipleship as products of historical, socio-historical and literary criticisms are important because they reveal the global function of discipleship. However, they fail to analyse and interpret how that global function is defined within the local, the social, cultural, economic, political and religious situations of people in the world encoded in the text, and in the world of the present reader. The proposed reading presented in this paper considers my situation and location as a reader in my Samoan world.

⁴ Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 1-2.

⁵ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 2, 163.

⁶ The following letter to the editor, which I will refer to as 'Letter One,' published in one of Samoa's popular newspapers, the *Samoa Observer*, gives an example of the kind of feeling now increasing about the relevancy of traditional discipleship understanding as practiced in Samoan churches. The letter criticizes the church for poverty and lack of help for families who are in need in Samoan society. Letter One ("Charity and the Church," *Samoa Observer*, 5 February 2012) says,

"The arguments of poverty and the church are more complex than we give them credit for but one thing is for sure, the church (in Samoa) has become an institution whose servants (church ministers) live less like Christ and more like Rock stars. ...The membership of the more established churches are leaving because many of its servants (church ministers) do not inspire the true meaning of faith, hope and charity because they themselves do not lead by example nor want to live it but wish to receive it."

From this letter, the church is blamed. For this paper, I put blame on the so-called one-dimensionality-emphasis of discipleship interpretation.

⁷ I will often use ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν as it has a unique significance to Matthew's gospel. This uniqueness is best explained in these words of Margaret Hannan, "Matthew uses the term ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν to refer to God's past and present activity, as sovereign ruler...." Margaret Hannan, *The Nature and Demands of the Sovereign Rule of God in the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2006), 34.

⁸ I am using here Bhabha's words. See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 10.

⁹ According to Naomi Choi, from a political point of view, one reason why that complexity



occurs is because egalitarianism as “equality is an intrinsically comparative idea.” She adds that comparing two things as equal is not an easy task unless particular aspects of each object thought to be equal are well specified. So egalitarianism as an idea that can define and explain how people in different situations in a context relate to each other is a complicated and provocative exercise. For example, if I talk about egalitarianism from a poor person’s point of view in a lower socio-economic situation, a rich person in a higher socio-economic situation may see it differently. Thus, egalitarianism as a comparative idea shows that there is not one type.

N. Choi, “Egalitarianism,” *EPT*: 411-414.

¹⁰ For example, a particular recognized honorific address as shown below categorises *matai* titles of special importance at the national level. This is a special honorific address used to address the traditional National Assembly of Samoa where particular paramount titles and senior orators are recognized. Through this categorization, there are chiefs of paramount status and those of lesser importance in national gatherings.

Tulouna Tupu o Samoa (With respect to the kings of Samoa)

Tulouna a Aiga ma a latou tama (With respect to the chiefly groups and their paramount issues)

Tulouna a Tumua ma Pule (With respect to the orator groups of Tumua and Pule)

Tulouna Ituau ma Alataua (With respect to the orator groups of Ituau and Alataua)

Tulouna Aiga-i-le-tai am le Vaa-o-Fonoti (With respect to the orator groups of Aiga-i-le-tai and Vaa- o-Fonoti)

Tulouna a le Faletolu ma tootoo o le Faleula (With respect to the orator groups of Tutuila and Manua)

Tulouna a le Tapuaiga (With respect to the orator group of Tapuaiga)

Tulouna Samoa potopoto (With respect to the assembly of Samoa)

See, Lealaiauloto Nofoaiga Kitiona and Fuataga Laulu Tauiliili, *O le Faavae o Samoa Anamua* (Apia: Malua Printing press, 1985), 8.

¹¹ Tofa is also the formal Samoan word for sleep (moe). It expresses the sense of thinking and contemplation while a person is in a process of getting to sleep. It pictures a *tautua* who in time of rest always think about ways to deal with his/her role as *tautua*.

¹² See, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi Efi’s, “Keynote Address for Pacific Futures Law and Religion Symposium,” (National University of Samoa, Lepapaigalagala, Samoa3 December 2008) accessed at <http://www.head-of-state-samoa.ws/pages/welcome.html> on 14th July 2013.

¹³ Jeannette Marie Mageo in her work on theorizing self in Samoa describes subjectivity in the Samoan world in the following way: “[I]n Samoan *loto* (will), “subjectivity,” is the marginalised element of the self.” Mageo does not mention the Samoan word that could have helped elaborate her definition of subjectivity. That word is *loto fuatiaifo*. This Samoan concept is made up of three words. *Loto* means the person’s will; *fuatia* means hit or touch; *ifo* is bow.

Putting the meanings together literally reveals subjectivity in Samoan world as a feeling or emotion in which a person's heart is touched by a moment outside of his/her self, producing an attraction which will make him/her deny self-needs in pursuit of it. This definition of subjectivity adds further information to Mageo's analysis of the self in the Samoan world. It reveals the emotional element that is very important in defining the subjectivity necessary when undertaking *tautua* in the interests of others regardless of status as shown in the undertaking of the male-female dualism in the sister-brother relationship in *faaSamoa*. Jeannette Marie Mageo, *Theorizing Self In Samoa: Emotions, Genders, and Sexualities* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), 11.

¹⁴ Various interpreters of the characterisation of the crowds in Matthew's Gospel, from the literary critical approach, commonly interpret the crowds as a single 'flat character' in contrast to the disciples who are considered a 'round character.' For example, Kingsbury looks at the crowd as a 'flat character' because they lack distinguishing characteristics. According to Kingsbury, the only time a change comes into view in the role of the crowd, is when they help Judas in Jesus' arrest (Mt 26:47-56). Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (2nd ed. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 23-24. For the different kinds of characters, see Mark Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 55; Janice Capel Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web: Over, and Over, and Over Again* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, JSNTSup 91, 1994), 81-83. The 'flat character' describes a static and predictable character, and the round character is a dynamic character that has conflicting traits. In contrast, Cousland regards the crowds as round characters. Cousland's claim is based on the crowds' identifying of Jesus as Son of David (12:23; 21:9), and their denial of Jesus (27:11-26) which are not parts of Mark's tradition. J.R.C. Cousland, *The Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, NovTSUP 102, 2002), 49.

¹⁵ It is a space of a new *βασιλεία* which will counter the *βασιλεία* of Rome, and the social, cultural, and religious systems and beliefs which have been oppressing and colonizing God's people (both Jews and Gentiles) in Galilee. Hence, Jesus will be seen taking on the mission of proclaiming the *βασιλεία* which will place him in the 'third space', which is not that of the coloniser/Rome or the colonisers of the Jewish Law and way of life, but as a servant of God, the earthly Messiah, to recognize the needs and rights of God's people in the midst of those colonial and oppressive powers and systems on earth according to the world encoded in the text.

¹⁶ The ambivalent character of the crowd is a debatable subject among Matthew's scholars. See, Vaitusi Nofoaga. "Crowd as Jesus' Disciples in the Matthean Gospel," (Master Thesis, University of Auckland, 2006).

¹⁷ A rhetorical unit has "a beginning, a middle, and an end." See George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 33-34. The rhetorical unit, 4:12-25, is attributed to Jesus. The narrator, in the beginning of the unit reveals Jesus as the main character.



¹⁸ For the meaning of ‘*inclusio*’ see Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 34, 82. For an example of how this language device is used in the first gospel see Charles H. Lohr, “Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew,” *CBQ*, vol. 23, (1961): 408-10. Lohr claims that Matthew is very fond of this device.

¹⁹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (NICT) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 39. According to France, Matthew’s use of Isaiah 9:1-2 has theological significance which is to indicate “Galilee as the place of light....”

²⁰ The meaning of imperfect in Greek is that it “is most closely represented by the English Past Continuous,” J. W. Wenham, *The Elements of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 54.

²¹ Kennedy translates Nicolaus the Sophist consideration of chreia as a statement that comes after the narrative. George A. Kennedy trans. *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbook of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Boston: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 139. Chreia as a rhetorical device has been long been debated and still no consensus of its meaning and use is reached. However, it does not take away the significance of its literary function which is to present a statement or action that is attributed to a particular person – a person of importance.

²² Isaiah 6:1-9:7 has been regarded as a distinct literary unit in the book of Isaiah. See Gene M. Tucker, *The Book of Isaiah 1-39* (NIB 6; Nashville: Abingdon, 2001)

²³ See David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 43-93; Halvor Moxnes, “Honor and Shame,” in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (ed. Richard Rohrbaugh; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 19-40; Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998); “Loss of Wealth, Loss of Family, Loss of Honor: The Cultural Context of the Original Makarisms in Q,” in *The Social World of the New Testament: Insights and Models* (ed. Jerome H. Neyrey and Eric C. Stewart; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 85-102;

²⁴ He came from the Davidic line which qualified him to be the Messiah according to the Israel’s prophets in the Old Testament. See Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, 37. That messianic honour is reinforced by the angel’s declaring of Jesus as Immanuel to Joseph (1:18-25), the three magi’s acknowledgment and recognition of the birth of Jesus as king of the Jews (2:1-13), God’s declaration of Jesus as his son in Jesus’ baptism (3:1-17), Jesus’ victory over the devil’s temptation (4:1-10), and the angels that waited upon Jesus (4:11). These references assert Jesus’ ascribed honour as having/giving the authority to undertake God’s salvific mission.

²⁵ See, John H. Elliot, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 130,133-34.

²⁶ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 80. See also Neyrey, *Honor and Shame*, 44-52.

²⁷ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 80.

²⁸ An enthymeme according to Aristotle is a rhetorical syllogism that is deduced from general and special truths. See Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric* (trans. J. H. Freese; Cambridge: Harvard, 1926-1991), xxxvi-xxxvii. In other words, it is a statement that infers a proposition or shows arriving at a conclusion. See also Burton L. Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 38-39.

²⁹ Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 80, says: "...gift-giving, invitations to dinner.... arranging what we might call cooperative ventures for farming, business, fishing, mutual help – all these sorts of interaction take place according to patterns of honor called challenge-response."

³⁰ Fishermen are regarded as people of low status in the Romans Empire. See K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 106-10.

³¹ In a review of Greek Inscriptions and papyri as new documents expressing and picturing early Christianity context, a small nearly square papyrus of a fishing lease agreement is examined and shows a lessor who provides the nets, boats, and fishermen given an agreement to pay to the quarter of their catch on the spot to the Roman government. If the two sets of brothers as fishermen that Jesus has called to follow him were working under a lease agreement, their immediate response to follow Jesus shows their abandoning of that lease agreement. If they add on top of the quarter share they give to the property owner a tax of their remaining three quarter then they are badly treated or in other words, they are simply colonized. See G.H.R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, vol. 3, (New South Wales: Macquarie University, 1983), 17-19.

³² For these fishermen 'shame' is an acceptable value because fishing is the way they provide for their needs. What this means is that despite the sense of negativity entailed in 'shame', it has a cultural acceptance in the Mediterranean world. Another example is that of gender difference which regarded the man's place as public and woman's place as private considered the woman's role as carrying 'shame' in terms of housework. Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," 21-22, 31-33.

³³ The household system of the first-century Mediterranean society was run and controlled patriarchally. This system as a family system is where the father as the patriarch is the head of the family who holds authority to control and run the family. See, Michael H. Crosby, *House of Disciples: Church, Economics, and Justice in Matthew* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1988), 26-27; Diane Jacobs-Malina, *Beyond Patriarchy: The Images of Family in Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 1-2. Patriarchal system is the system that runs the Roman imperial power structure where the Emperor becomes the patriarch and everyone else under him are his children which means he has authority and power to control them all. In this way, the Emperor and the people close to him according to the Roman imperial system have honour and the rest are categorised by shame. See, Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 9-34.

³⁴ For explanations of the patron-client relationship, see John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina ed.,

Handbook of Biblical Social Values (Peabody: Hendrickson 1998), 151-55; Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, 37-39, 47-48, 108-14, 156-61.

³⁵ For example, John Elliot considers Jesus' movement as 'faction' and Bruce Malina's regards Jesus' group as 'sect'. As a faction, Jesus as the leader recruits people in accordance with his understanding of Judaism. And as such, despite a faction's deviating from the corporate body of Judaism, it still considers itself part of Judaism like the Pharisees and Sadducees. See John H. Elliott, "The Jewish Messianic Movement: From Faction to Sect," in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-scientific studies of the New Testament in its context* (London: Routledge, 1995), 96-113. As a sect, Jesus and his followers separate themselves completely from the corporate body of Judaism and develop their own ideologies. Both claims are convincing when faction as Jesus' group is viewed in light of Jesus' time, and when sect as Jesus' group is described from the perspective of early Christianity. See Bruce J. Malina, "Early Christian Groups: Using small group formation theory to explain Christian organizations," in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-scientific studies of the New Testament in its context* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995), 75-95. But, Dennis Duling's dealing with this issue in light of the Graeco-Roman society as a "middle range society, one that has evolved beyond the simple society into a complex social system" brings another dimension to the debate. Duling considers the importance of viewing the society that shaped the Matthean story of Jesus' ministry in the time of the Roman empire as an advanced agrarian society. According to Duling, how to encounter the changes in that type of society is one of the reasons small fictive kin groups were formed especially when real family groups were in decline. And the group Duling refers to that defines the followers of Jesus is the brotherhood voluntary association. Dennis C. Duling, "The Matthean Brotherhood and Marginal Scribal Leadership," in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-scientific studies of the New Testament in its context* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995), 160.

³⁶ For a brief discussion see, Karl Olav Sandnes, "Equality Within Patriarchal Structures: Some New Testament perspectives on the Christian fellowship as a brother- or sisterhood and family," in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as social reality and metaphor* (ed. Halvor Moxnes; London/New York: Routledge, 1997), 150-165.

³⁷ Dennis Duling recognizes the significance of the distinct ways shown in the consideration of the social nature of Jesus' group as faction and sect. His interpretation of Jesus' group as the Matthean group moves beyond 'faction' and 'sect' – not a sentence. He takes into consideration the Graeco-Roman society as an advanced agrarian society where complex social arrangements are introduced and implemented while most people lack knowledge to deal with them. See, Duling, "The Matthean Brotherhood," 159-182.

³⁸ Duling, "The Matthean Brotherhood," 159.

³⁹ According to Craig Keener's socio-rhetorical interpretation of the calling of the fishermen (4:17-22), if we look at Jesus' ministry or discipleship in the first century Mediterranean

world as a seasonal ministry, it is possible that the disciples did return to their families in some parts of the year. Keener adds that agrarian workers can afford being away from sowing and harvesting but for a fisherman being away from fishing for a long period of time is costly for the family. Keener also shows that weather conditions stopped people from making long distance travel. For those reasons, Keener stated that “while disciples undoubtedly spent some nights away from home (especially when they traversed the lake), the Gospel itineraries suggest that they often ministered within walking distance of Capernaum.” Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 148-155. One implication of Keener’s interpretation of 4:18-22 is that considering following Jesus as a mission to abandon one’s family is not the conclusive consideration of the fishermen’s following. Overman’s interpretation of the fishermen’s following is another that speaks against assuming the disciples’ following Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel as a mission where there is no returning home. According to Overman, “[o]ne could easily travel with Jesus for several days, or even one day, get to a Galilean town, engage in an argument with local leaders, and be home by nightfall.” The different picture Keener and Overman speak about here is that leaving one’s family to follow Jesus’ without return is not a compelling characteristic of following Jesus in Matthew’s gospel. He added that the Matthean narrative has shown that despite some tensions between Jesus and his family and village, Jesus did retain his connections with his mother and village. Overman then said that in considering those reasons we can say that there is “a different picture of the relationship between the Jesus’ movement and their native region, Lower Galilee.” J. Andrew Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew* (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996), 67.

⁴⁰ Wainwright’s interpretation of Jesus’ healing of women in Matthew’s gospel reflects Jesus’ healing approach as holistic and wholistic in which the participation of the sick as the healed in the healing process is very important. See Elaine M. Wainwright, “Your Faith Has Made You Well.” Jesus, Women, and Healing in the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Transformative Encounters: Jesus & Women Re-reviewed* (ed. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2000), 224-245; Elaine M. Wainwright, *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel According to Matthew* (BZNW 60. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 83-95; 98-117. In a comparison of Jesus healing ministry in the New Testament to Traditional and Christian Samoan healing practices, Otele Perelini points out that one of the similarities of those healing activities is the use of the holistic approach where the healing is seen as more than the physical remedy of the body. See Otele Perelini, “A Comparison of Jesus’ Healing with Healing in Traditional and Christian Samoa,” (PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1992).

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Teu le Va': The Samoan cosmic-community in Aotearoa. Preserving harmonious relationships... where is the harmony?

Terry Pouono

At the time of writing this article, Terry Pouono was starting his second year as a PhD student at the School of Theology of the University of Auckland. After teaching at Malua Theological College for six years, Terry wanted to return to Aotearoa to pursue his research interests concerning many issues surrounding the diaspora Pacific churches, particularly the Congregational Christian Church Samoa. His PhD thesis investigates the effects of globalization of Samoan Christian identity, writing from the perspective of a New Zealand born Samoan. He hopes to contribute to existing literature regarding the Pacific communities, which, in his view has limited contribution from Pacific theologians. Terry is married with three young children.

Abstract

The development and promotion in recent years of Pacific indigenous epistemology is an attempt by Pacific academics, theologians included, to explore and expand indigenous worldviews and forms of knowledge as an alternative to western epistemological paradigms. The Samoan concept of 'Teu le va' has been applied by contemporary Pacific scholars, referring to a negotiating and mediating of relationships between Pacific and non-Pacific cultures and forms of knowledge.

This paper serves two purposes. Firstly it investigates 'Teu le Va' as advanced in contemporary secular investigations. My contention is that it ignores to an extent, the cosmological beliefs that are central to understanding its exposition. Secondly, I will address the implications of Teu le Va' within the framework of Samoan community with particular focus on the Samoan church. My argument is that despite the ethical constituents of 'Teu le Va' in preserving balance and harmony in relations, the concept and practice adversely promotes increasing social, economic and political imbalance between the 'haves and the have nots' in the Samoan community in Aotearoa.



Introduction

Pacific indigenous knowledge, and indigenous knowledge on a wider scale, has been victim to the suffocating coercion of the dominant Western paradigms since cultural contact and the exchange of experiences began. From the perspective of indigenous groups, the ongoing relationship with the western world generates a continuing problem of hegemonic domination of epistemological knowledge and inequality of power.¹ The recognition of the indigenous worldview also became an issue for churches of the global North (or the West, indicating Churches of western tradition). During the 20th century there were salient shifts in theological thought and mission paradigms in an endeavour to fulfil God's purpose. One of the major shifts in Christian mission involved the majority shift, or general influence, from the North to the South.² Christianity in Europe was undergoing major change with de-Christianization accelerating at an increasing rate through secularism.³ The majority shift to the South was evident in the growing influence of indigenous groups in Christian organizations such as the World Council of Churches and Council for World Mission.

The paradigm shift led to the development of 'intercultural theology' as an acknowledged point of discussion in the 1970s and the 1980s. It disclosed many of the limitations of the traditional systematic and historical theologies of the North and the emergence of the local theologies of indigenous groups in the South.⁴ Adding to this phenomenon, missiological research in recent times had become an increasingly prominent tool for critically reflecting on the history of organized missions to non-western nations, particularly the problems of communication of the gospel across boundaries, cultures and religions. Much criticism has been directed to the process of evangelization by western missionaries, who promulgated a gospel that was not free from 'culturally conditioned perceptions' of western culture.⁵ Rather than providing an opportunity for open engagement and seeking authentic indigenous expression of the gospel message, indigenization⁶ and adaptation⁷ contributed to the hegemonic relationships between missionaries and receptors of the gospel message.

Hence for indigenous groups, the motivating drive in advancing indigenous ideas is a result of many years of suppression by western ideologies and, like a volcano that has been dormant for centuries, indigenous

knowledge has finally erupted. In the Pacific, scholars in the past three decades have introduced new theological concepts, such as Sione Havea's coconut theology, Ilaitia Tuwere's theology of the *Vanua* and Winston Halapua's Moana Methodology.⁸ In Africa, the concept of Jesus is an ancestor' saw the inculturation of Christology grounded in the core values of indigenous African belief systems. The gradual emergence of contextual theology was not an abstract ideology, but it was grounded in concrete forms that connect with the people and their societies. It fostered a renewal and a regeneration of Christian identity.

Now, for the purposes of this investigation, we will not attempt to formulate a new theological perspective but instead we will investigate briefly the Samoan concept of *teu le va*, looking at the different nuances surrounding this ideological belief system. This will be achieved as we briefly explore the idea of Negotiated Space as advocated by Pacific scholars. Furthermore for comparative purposes, a traditional understanding of *teu le va* from a Samoan worldview will be presented. In addition, we will discuss the existing complexities of *teu le va* in the context of Aotearoa and provide some theological insights to the investigation.

What is *teu le va*?

Vā is a Samoan term that is simply translated as 'space' or 'interval'.⁹ It designates spatial distance between two points or objects.¹⁰ Of great significance to the Samoan understanding is that the *vā* is not an empty space, rather it is relational. *Vā* is not space that separates but space that relates.¹¹ The *vā* can also refer to a state of rivalry.¹² The latter definition not only shows that the concept is relational, but explicitly presupposes an engagement between two parties in a state of competition or variance of some sort. *Teu* means to 'preserve' or 'keep' something. With this in mind, *teu le va* may mean different things; negotiating spaces, negotiating diversity or a reconciling of differences in relations. However within the context of the Samoan worldview, *teu le va* is commonly understood as preserving harmony in relations.

Teu le va as Negotiating Spaces

Negotiated Space is a concept that was developed in response to a need to raise awareness of indigenous knowledge and worldviews as alternative views



to western science. Originally explicated by Maori and Pacific Island scholars of the University of Auckland, the idea was researched further in the area of Pacific Mental Health in New Zealand. Advanced as a model for ‘empowering indigenised theorising’,¹³ it endorses mutual dialogue between the dominant mainstream and indigenous groups.¹⁴ In the process, terms such as ‘negotiation’, ‘mutuality’ and ‘reciprocity’ replaced hegemonic concepts historically used in colonial relationships such as ‘assimilation’ and ‘inculturation.’ *Teu le va* as Negotiating Spaces is a dialogic process of mutual negotiation and mediation between knowledge bases. In the process of negotiating spaces, *teu le va* as a negotiating mechanism seeks to understand, acknowledge and respect the worldviews and spaces of the other party in the negotiating process.

Now after reflecting on this, I wish to highlight that there is always the danger of misinterpretation when indigenous concepts are used. One thing I learnt during my 10 years in Samoa is that before using a proverb or concept, make sure when you use it, it is not used out of context. The primary factor behind *teu le va* is the concern for preserving harmonious relationships. Knowledge transmission may be the cause for engagement, but it is not the objective.

Teu le va: a cosmological belief

Teu le va is a belief that transcends social space and relations between individuals or groups. It implies relations in the cosmological, physical and spiritual realms. The *va* is about open spaces and relationships with animate and inanimate objects, material and the spiritual, that which is visible to the human eye and that which cannot be comprehended by human understanding and knowledge.

The *va* is fully realized when there is harmony with oneself, harmony with the other person, harmony with the environment and with the cosmos.¹⁵ The interconnectedness of these different elements encompasses an identity moulded by a mutual communion of an inclusive nature. Tui Atua illustrates how harmony is sought in the Samoan worldview; he writes,

...the Samoan search for harmony is premised on Samoan indigenous narratives of creation. For ancient Samoans it was a logic that operated more as a collection of related principles and metaphors that gave meaning and connection rather than as a religion with set theological parameters.¹⁶

In Samoan indigenous belief, the cosmos is made up of heaven which is portrayed as the giver of life; the earth is the mother that carries life in the womb and humanity is the embodiment of that life.¹⁷ This cosmic triad not only has a reciprocal relationship, but the existence of each member is dependent on this relationship with the other.¹⁸ The socio-ecological model of the Samoan worldview is therefore cosmo-centric as opposed to anthropological.¹⁹ The fundamental principles of mutuality, interdependence and inclusiveness are elements that ground the social stratum of community. The holistic perception of self is something that is not isolated from the cosmos, but deeply entrenched in it and with it. A cosmic identity is formed in an inter-related union with other people, family, village, land, titles, status, customs, traditions, inheritance, Samoan myths, personal stories, history, ancestors, sacred objects, even plants and animal life.²⁰ The cosmic community, as portrayed by Vaai ‘is the matrix that shapes and defines the identity of the individual.’²¹

René Descartes’ philosophical statement ‘I think, therefore I am’ was to prove his logic that we exist based on the premise of the human capacity to think. In the Samoan worldview of cosmic community, one could say, ‘I am because we are.’ One’s existence and identity are understood in relationship to the whole.²²

In Sociology, the functionalist theory²³ or functionalism investigates how different elements of society are comprised and interconnected to form a cultural whole. Functionalists would examine the process upon which new data are introduced into a society. The conflicts that may arise are resolved by the society as it aspires for stability and balance. The functionalist approach to culture is a quest for order and understanding where everything within society makes sense, and has meaning. The model of the *FaaSamoa* and *Teu le va* as a cosmic-centric system represents this concept in that it is self-enclosed and self-sufficient as it is governed by a rule-bound tradition. It is like dismantling and the putting together a jigsaw puzzle. For the final picture or image to be completed, all the jigsaw pieces must be slotted in the correct position. The various aspects of society must interrelate to create meaning with the expectation of coherence and continuity.

Also important to the understanding of *teu le va* is the need to respect sacred spaces or *va tapuia*. It is believed that the respect for sacred covenants or *feagaiga*, and taboos or *tapu* would result in peace, good fortune, growth,



prosperity²⁴ and the continual preservation of harmony with other elements of the cosmos.²⁵ Conversely, the violation of the *va tapuia* results in misfortune, poverty and chaos. Prior to the arrival of Christianity, many animate and inanimate objects of the cosmos were considered sacred and were venerated as gods. With the introduction of Christianity, there was a shift in the *va tapuia* to indicate the relationship between humans and the Christian God. *Teu le va* demands a respect for existing boundaries and relations. If for some reason the boundaries are transgressed and relationships are compromised, '*ia teu le va*' is verbally expressed which necessitates an action to rectify the wrongdoing.

Teu le va: an ethical relationship

Teu le va also sets the ethical conduct and moral principles within the *fa'aSamoa*²⁶ in every day social relations. The ethical values of the *fa'aSamoa* and rules of conduct are recognized in relation to the concept of *fa'aaloalo*, simply translated as 'respect'. '*Fa'aaloalo*' is a symbol that shapes the whole of the Samoan existence.²⁷ *Fa'aaloalo* is the mechanism of harmonious relationships as negotiated in *teu le va*. Harmony is sought when the *va* is treated with the utmost respect. The operating logic of the *fa'aaloalo* therefore serves two purposes. First, it enforces harmonious relationships. Second, social cohesion is promoted at different levels: within the family, village/church, the wider community and the whole cosmos. As a stabilizing mechanism, respect of the *va* is the 'spine' that binds together community within the gerontocratic²⁸ framework. The vitality of the Samoan culture finds its energy in sustaining the *va* and its image as a cosmic community. Every individual within the *fa'aSamoa* is brought up to value caring for one another. The whole culture is founded on mutual sharing and reciprocity and no one is exempted from the rule. In an environment of familiarity where there is a great sense of expectation, it is vital that roles and responsibilities are fulfilled properly. In all relationships, roles are socially determined; for example the relationship between brother and sister, a *matai* (chief) and his family, or the triad relationship between a minister, the congregation and God.

'E le tauilo fanau o tupu' is a Samoan saying that implies that children who are well nurtured by their parents are easily identified; they speak with politeness, use the appropriate language in different scenarios and they behave

appropriately. For example, when one walks in front of another who is seated, it is custom to say '*tulou*' and walk past in a crouching manner with head down. A formal address is used when addressing a minister and his wife. On an overcrowded bus, it is *fa'aaloalo* for a young person to give up his or her seat to an elderly passenger and children must show 'unquestioning obedience' to their parents.²⁹ These are just some examples of behaviours that exemplify the concept of *fa'aaloalo*.

As a premise for relational conduct, the *va* administers respect for anyone regardless of whether it is a friend, relative or stranger. In a situation of conflict, there must be an attempt to reconcile differences through forgiveness, love and compassion.³⁰ Despite a strong sense of ethnocentric pride in preserving things that are Samoan, it is imperative for a Samoan to create and maintain good relations with a non-Samoan. Thus, for example, when a guest departs from the home of a Samoan, it is vital that he or she has left satisfied and content by the hospitality given by the host. In the following section, I would like to raise some 'food for thought.' With the Samoan diaspora; how is *teu le va* applied in foreign environments?

Teu le va in Aotearoa: Transplanting or Renewal?

The mass migration of Samoans to Aotearoa during the last 60 years or so was seen as a step to greater things, for the new land was seen as the land of opportunity. Despite encountering an environment foreign to them, it was inevitable that in time, communities would be built up.³¹ The connectedness of Samoan migrants to the homeland (Samoa) is a bond that cannot be disconnected; the Samoan church is to the Samoan people what water is to fish. The persistence of Samoan migrants to replicate the 'church' of the village, which portrayed the holy and sacred place of God to foreign soil, suggests a fundamental religious character entrenched in faith and faithfulness to their spiritual and cultural roots. Ioka reaffirms this:



...in the Samoan mind the ‘Church rooted in Culture’ was the ‘womb and reservoir’ of the birth and rebirth of the national identity of modern Samoa which is shown to be fundamentally religious...what is believed to have preserved their human spirit and the life giving aspects of their culture in their home society and created the modern identity of Samoa is also trusted to preserve Samoan Christianity in countries of migration.³²

People want to preserve Samoan identity as if it had a fixed nature because they consider it a gift from God. For, it characterizes their most authentic vision and version of a Christian culture. In a multi-faceted world where various changing social realities are seen as a threat to their identity, Samoans would opt for exclusion from these external influences. There is a reluctance of migrants to explore other alternatives that might further enrich the Samoan Christian identity. As a New Zealand born Samoan, my position may present the danger of bias by favouring one position over the other. So I have raised the following questions for reflection: what is the significance of transplanting? What are the dangers? On the other hand, what would be the benefits of transforming or being open to new possibilities and solutions? In addressing these opposing views, I give this investigation direction and a basis for making practical proposals.

One of the purposes of the establishment of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS) on New Zealand soil is the idea that it serves the purpose of reaffirming the Samoan Christian identity in a multi-faceted society. Why is this reaffirmation important? It is significant for the preservation of what Samoan people perceive as a living tradition. That living tradition is the *va, fa'aaloalo*, the *faaSamoa* (Samoan culture) and most importantly the gospel which grounds all of these elements. If a living tradition forms a living community, then the traditional forms of Samoan Christianity in Aotearoa exercise this idea by linking the community together on a religious and cultural basis.

With an emphasis on coherence and continuity the CCCS is perceived as a communication system or the driving force for providing resources for incorporating innovative aspects into a community. The transplanting and development of the CCCS gave a sense of recognition, dignity and pride for Samoan people in a foreign land. In a sense, not only does a living tradition

form a living community, but also a community can bring life to a tradition that is meaningful to them. Is the transplanting of the CCCS the best means of making the gospel a living reality in *Aotearoa*? In the mind of many Samoans, particularly the majority of the migrants, it is.

What about transformation? Transformation is an act or process of change. In the context of the CCCS church in Aotearoa, it stresses that the method of transplanting needs to be followed up by renewal. The consequences of renewal might have an inspiring and encouraging effect. On the other hand, however, renewal may weaken the link between the CCCS in New Zealand and the homeland. Therefore transformation is seen as risky by some in the CCCS. A new life in Christ must find expression in the life of the church at all levels. Each church or congregation will clearly show the signs and marks of this renewal. It must be identified that the congregation is set in a particular time and place, it has a context, and the marks of renewal may well be different in many diverse contexts in which the church lives and offers its witness. This renewal is never for our sake alone. It is for the sake of the renewal of human community by making the church a more efficient and valuable sign and instrument. There needs to be a prophetic voice calling for the ministry to move forward and to be creative. The challenge would be to find the balance between respect of the Christian identity and the need to transform it.

To an extent, I agree with Tupua Tamasese Ef³³ and Melani Anae³⁴ when, in their respective writings, they stressed that aspects of traditional Samoan spirituality may offer resolutions to many of the social problems evident in Samoa, and Samoan communities around the world. Some of the problems they may be referring to include suicide, domestic violence, crime, gambling, unemployment, underachievement in schools, financial hardships, family breakdown and loss of family estates; the actuality of these problems indicates that harmony is a distant reality.

In my view, there are two issues that need to be addressed here. First, the problem is that *teu le va* is transplanted, rather than translated and renewed in time and space. Aotearoa is a multi-faceted society and the global world is the ‘new cosmos’ and this is the 21st century. This demands a need to respect spaces that extend beyond the cosmic-community zone into the multi-faceted world of Aotearoa. Renewal of the *va* does not devalue its worth as a cosmological and ethical belief and practice. It does not take away the core



principles of mutual reciprocity and inclusiveness; conversely it enhances its own essence as an authentic practice in line with the gospel. New relationships must be acknowledged in the new cosmos. Responsibilities must be reassessed and there needs to be a reconfiguration of boundaries in a multi-faceted world.

This leads us to the second issue, which concerns the assumption that equilibrium is an on-going dynamic in *teu le va* relationships. In a world where the laws of market state that 'the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer,' the struggle for survival in a competitive world and the intensification of global forces on local perceptions indicate an inevitable influence on indigenous value systems and local theologies. This generates an increasing imbalance in relationships within the Samoan cosmic community. Competition, power, greed, pride, ignorance, social and political injustice are characteristics that have compromised what *teu le va* stands for- harmonious relationships. They create a community of the haves, and the have nots. Using these labels, 'haves and have nots', in this investigation signifies a shift in emphasis of *teu le va* as a cosmological belief system to an anthropocentric perception. The 'haves' of the Samoan community are the educated elite, the decision makers, the political, cultural and religious leaders with strong social and economic networks. This group is marked by wealth, status and power. Now I firmly believe there is nothing wrong with being associated with this group. However, the underlying problem is that certain people with privileges contribute to oppression and exploitation of the 'have nots', which in effect further enhances the status quo.

In a world where capitalism and the market economy have influenced many aspects of life, including religion, many Samoan families who continue to honour the *va* have given relentless commitment to church and family obligations resulting in extreme financial hardships and social problems. One prominent example is the practice of excessive monetary giving in the Samoan church, which has been recognized by non-Samoans in Aotearoa as a contributing cause to the problem.³⁵ From an emic position, this cultural practice is regarded as unlimited service to all components of the *va*. Theologically, it denotes one's sacrifice to God. The underlying fact is, *teu le va* is preserved. Indeed these values are important but when boundaries of the *va* are stretched and manipulated. It results in economic, political and psychological problems encountered by Pacific families in a multi-faceted world.

As a consequence, many Samoans who are involved in the Samoan community and church, in particular New Zealand born Samoans, have adopted a ‘one foot in and one foot out of the *va*’ approach. One such position implies a state of ambiguity, uncertainty and a lack of commitment to programs of the Samoan community, and at times results in a change in religious affiliations. In effect, the continual struggle to preserve the *va* creates negotiators of the *va*. These negotiators oscillate between the cosmic-centered community and the multi-faceted world; between preserving harmonious relationships and seeking autonomy in open spaces; between respect for family tradition and surviving in a capitalist society; between a cosmic-centered identity and a globalized identity; between maintaining connections with the past, yet using opportunities to move creatively across boundaries. What are the implications for the Samoan church? What must the church do to make *teu le va* an authentic belief in line with the gospel?

Oikumene: a call for justice in *teu le va*

The Samoan church is not called to be a silent supporter, but to adopt a revolutionary option under the mandate of the gospel. For the church, *teu le va* can be fully realized by tending to the marginalized of the community, offering greater support systems to those who need jobs and education, tending to the sick (mental and physical), up-skilling our leaders including ministers, providing financial advice to families, sharing resources and time, being aware of those who are considered ‘at risk’, and even the simple things in life like parents spending quality time with children.

When equilibrium is distorted in the cosmic realm, the theological concept ‘*oikumene*³⁶’ brings to the fore a call for justice in systems of injustice. *Oikumene* comes from the words *oikos* meaning ‘household’ which can also refer to the ‘whole inhabited earth’, and *nomos* law or management. It therefore refers to laws of the household or stewardship. If Christian theology forwards the belief that all aspects of our life, the spiritual, physical, psychological and so forth are subject to God’s love and grace, then *oikumene* or God’s economy informs us that the management of His household must be in line with His intentions and demands.³⁷ According to biblical traditions, particularly the ministry of Jesus, the objective is a household grounded on love and justice. Christian mission is to bring life in all its fullness.



One of the limitations of *teu le va* is that it emphasizes preserving harmonious relationships in the quest for social cohesion, but does not state whether the actions involved in achieving the goal are moral. In consequential ethics, the study of Utilitarianism states that the ethical value of conduct is determined by the utility of its results.³⁸ Morality in this case, is based on obedience to the principles and traditions of the *va*. What the *va* does not acknowledge is the expression of individual feeling, conscience or love.³⁹ It raises the moral question: are all actions performed in fulfilling *teu le va* moral or right? The commandment to love God and to love thy neighbour⁴⁰ opens doors to *teu le va* as both a theological and ethical belief. The order is significant, first honour God then give one's life to serving ones neighbour. It maximizes its witness as an ethic of love stemming from the belief that God is love, and minimizes the idea of *teu le va* as a legalistic framework.

The nature of God's mission can be understood in eschatological terms here and now, that we hope for a consummation of God's reign in terms of love, justice and equality for all humanity. If life is a pilgrimage, a journey whereby Christian identity is an eschatological notion and something we must strive for continuously, then the mission of the CCCS must be guided by the Holy Spirit, as we continually 'run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfector of our faith.'⁴¹

Notes

¹ Karlo Mila-Schaaf & Maui Hudson, Negotiating Space for Indigenous Theorising in Pacific Mental Health and Addictions [electronic source], (Auckland), 16.

² Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and the Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 2-3.

³ Frans Wijsen, Intercultural theology and the mission of the church, in *Mission is a must: Intercultural theology and the mission of the church*, edited by Frans Wijsen & Peter Nissen (New York: Rodopi Firm, 2002).

⁴ Werner Ustorf, "The Cultural Origins of Intercultural Theology" in *Mission Studies* 25, no. 1 (2008): 229.

⁵ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 2.

⁶ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 2. Indigenization is the process whereby the Christian message was related to traditional cultural forms of religion or the religious convictions of the missionary.

⁷ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 2. Adaptation denotes that the missionaries carried with them the conviction that they had the pure gospel, and therefore it was imperative that this gospel needed to be adapted to the receptor culture.

⁸ Vanua is the Fijian word for land. Vanua Theology is specifically associated with Ilaitia Tuwere, Coconut theology is associated with Sione Aminaki Havea, and Moana Theology with Winston Halapua.

⁹ Papaalii Semisi Ma’ia’i, *Tusi Upu Samoa: the Samoan dictionary of Papaalii Dr Semisi Ma’ia’i*. Volume 1: Samoan To English (Auckland: Little Island press), 53.

¹⁰ Schaaf & Hudson, *Negotiating Space*, Quoting Refiti: 2000, 209.

¹¹ Schaaf & Hudson, *Negotiating Space*, 16.

¹² Ma’ia’i, *Tusi Upu Samoa*, 53.

¹³ Schaaf and Hudson, *Negotiating Space*, 5. The model was initiated by Linda Smith.

¹⁴ Schaaf and Hudson, *Negotiating Space*, 7.

¹⁵ Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi, “In Search of Harmony: Peace in the Samoan Indigenous Religion” in *Su’esu’e Manogi In Search of Fragrance Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi and the Samoan Indigenous Reference*,” ed. Tamasailau M. Suaalii-Sauni et al. (Apia: National University of Samoa, 2008), 104. According to Tui Atua peace equates to harmony in the Samoan religious tradition.

¹⁶ Efi, *In Search of Harmony*, 104.

¹⁷ Vaai, “Faaaloalo: a Theological Re-interpretation of the Doctrine of the Trinity from a Samoan perspective.” (PhD: Griffith University, 2006), 163.

¹⁸ Vaai, 163-164

¹⁹ Vaai, 164. See also Amaamalele Tofaeono, ‘Eco- Theology: Aiga- The HouseHold of Life. A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa.

²⁰ Efi, *In Search of Harmony*, 104.

²¹ Vaai, Faaaloalo, 58-59, 72.

²² Vaai, Faaaloalo, 172.

²³ Ashley Crossman, “Functionalist Theory: An Overview.” Accessed July 30th, 2013, <http://www.sociology.about.com/od/Sociological-Theory/a/Functionalist-Theory.htm>. The origins of this theory were found in the works of Emile Durkheim. The basic objective of this approach focuses on how each part of society work together to contribute to the stability of the whole.

²⁴ Efi, *In Search of Harmony*, 106.

²⁵ Efi, *In Search of Harmony*, 107.



²⁶ Meleisea, Lagaga: *A Short History*, 24-38. “The Samoan Way”- ideals, values and belief systems.

²⁷ Vaai, Faaaloalo, 58.

²⁸ A Gerontocratic society is a society in which the government or state is ruled by elders.

²⁹ Jemaima Tiatia, Caught Between Cultures: A New Zealand Born Pacific Island Perspective (Auckland: Christian Research Association, 1998), 7.

³⁰ Efi, In Search of Harmony, 109.

³¹ Levesi Afutiti, “Samoan Church and Church Diaspora: A Case Study of the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa,” *Pacific Journal of Theology* 2, no. 16 (1996): 19.

³² Danny Ioka, “Origin and beginning of the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa (CCCS) in Aotearoa New Zealand” (PhD: University of Otago, 1998), 133.

³³ Efi, In Search of Harmony, 114.

³⁴ Melani Anae, *Towards Reclaiming Pacific Spirituality in New Zealand in the 21st Century*. Paper presented at the “Pacific Futures: Preparing Pacific Communities for the 21st Century” Conference, University of Auckland, August 28-31, 2006.

³⁵ Chris Nicol, My God: Conversations about Spirituality, with Chris Nicol. (Video) Series 1, Pacific Screen Ltd 2008. Interview with the Laughing Samoans, Ete Eteuati and Tofiga Pepulea’i.

³⁶ Philip Potter, “One Obedience to the Whole Gospel,” *The Ecumenical Review* 29, no. 4 (1977): 363.

³⁷ Konrad Raiser, “Ecumenism in Search of a New Vision” in *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, edited by Michael Kinnamon & Brian E. Cope (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 76.

³⁸ Mel Thompson, *Understand Ethics* (Blacklick: McGraw-Hill Professional Publishing, 2010), 76. The principal was advocated by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) who argued that an action should be judged based on the consequences. If the action leads to greater happiness and benefits the greatest number, as opposed to pain, then it is ethical.

³⁹ Thompson, *Understand Ethics*, 93.

⁴⁰ New Revised Standard Version Holy Bible, Matthew 22: 37&39 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind...you shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

⁴¹ New Revised Standard Version Holy Bible, *Hebrews 12:1b-2a* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 226.

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Anthropological Perspectives on Oceanic Biblical Interpretation

Matt Tomlinson Introduction

Matt Tomlinson was born and raised in New Jersey, USA. Since 1996, he has conducted research in Fiji on the topics of indigenous Christianity, ritual, language, and politics. He spent part of 2009 conducting research at the Pacific Theological College, which has led to the development of a new project titled "Divine Power in Indigenous Christianity: Translation, Theology, and Pacific Politics," funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC). He is currently an ARC Future Fellow at the Australian National University in Canberra.

From an anthropological perspective, the Bible looks like a topographical map: some passages dominate the landscape and catch people's attention, whereas others sit quietly in place, fully visible but not often noticed. In this article, I show how verses' prominence shifts according to cultural perspective.

Cultural anthropologists often take delight in finding examples that challenge assumptions of cultural universality. Analyzing Christianity as a cultural system—that is, Christianity as taught and learned socially—one might expect to find several firm bases of common belief and experience. For example, one might think that all Christians believe that God is eternal, and that Jesus is always an important figure. Yet neither of these claims is true; as Olivia Harris observes, rural Bolivian Catholics believe that “God is not eternal. He has not been there since the beginning of time,” and “Jesus Christ...is not a significant figure in local



forms of Christianity. Some people barely recognize the name” (Harris 2006: 52, 58). Similarly, one might think that all Christians consider the Bible to be the most important sacred text. This is also not true, as seen in the case of the Masowe Apostolics of Zimbabwe, who believe that the Bible’s materiality gets in the way of a pure spiritual connection with God: “They do not allow Bibles to be brought to their religious services, and they consider any direct reference to Scripture...sinful” (Engelke 2004: 77). If one looks for universally valid claims about Christianity’s role in society—promoting peace, for example—one is thwarted even more decisively.

Anthropologists who have studied the use of the Bible have, therefore, looked for diversity rather than uniformity. This article is an effort in that spirit. It is not meant to explain how citational and interpretive hierarchies develop, but rather to provide an overview of terrain for anthropological and theological exploration. In the first part of the article, I examine the use of Genesis 1:26 in Fiji. Next, I consider examples of the use of John 3:16 in Fiji and the Solomon Islands. Finally, I examine the work of one anthropologist, Joel Robbins, who has published detailed and illuminating analyses of the use of the Bible in highland Papua New Guinea.

Genesis 1:26

The verses Genesis 1:26–28 “are at the heart of the doctrine of *imago Dei*—the idea that human beings in some way possess the image and likeness of God, and that this possession somehow also affirms a unique place for humanity within the created cosmos” (Garner 2006: 70–71). Karl Barth observed that scholars have tended to read their own expectations into the text—indeed, have engaged in “pure invention” of its meaning (Barth 1958: 193)—and his point about diversity within scholarship holds true for diversity across cultures as well. Stephen Garner notes that the diversity of interpretations of the doctrine of *imago Dei* can be grouped into three main categories: “Firstly, that the image is substantive, reflecting God in the physical, psychological or metaphysical aspects of the human person. Secondly, that the image is relational, of importance in relationships vertically between God and the human person and horizontally between human beings. And thirdly, that the image is manifested functionally, in that human beings act as God or God’s agents within creation because they also bear God’s image” (Garner 2006: 72; see *ibid.*: 69–136 for an overview of histories of interpretation).

During fieldwork in Kadavu, Fiji, in the 1990s and 2000s, the Bible passage I heard referred to most often was the first part of Genesis 1:26, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (English-language Bible passages in this article are from the King James Version; “Let us make man” was usually paraphrased by Fijian speakers as “Tou ia tou bulia na tamata”). Invoked in different contexts such as Methodist church services, personal conversations, and a government workshop I attended, this passage from Genesis 1:26 was used as both a lament and an exhortation. It was evidently meant as a call for people to live up to the image of godly perfection which they mirrored at the time of Creation. In other words—in my reading of other people’s readings—speakers used the verse to say, with divine authority, that people (both themselves and others) were no longer living up to god-given possibility.

Not all Fijian interpreters have understood this verse in those terms, however. An especially vivid difference is manifest in the work of Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, the former principal of the Pacific Theological College (1982-1988) and president of the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma (1996-1998). Tuwere writes of Genesis 1:26, “The text cannot be a declaration about man, but about the *creation* of man” (2002: 122). In Genesis 1:26, according to Tuwere, “God contracts himself. In this contraction, he allows himself to be humiliated. He humiliates himself by cutting himself down to size as it were to be with his earthly creature, the human being, in the process of his coming into being” (*ibid.*). In this kenotic interpretation, God comes down to the human level, inverting the image from Kadavu of humans needing to be lifted up to a higher level.

Other scholars working in Fiji have observed the comparative prominence of other verses—namely, Psalms 127:1 (Miyazaki 2004: 111; Newland 2006: 300) and the second half of Ecclesiastes 10:8 (Tippett 1960: 90)¹. There is also the spectacular example of the national rugby team, which once sported the logo “PHIL 4:13” on the front of its jerseys. To consider further why some verses gain prominence while others do not, I now turn to one of the most prominent of all.



John 3:16

If the Bible is like a topographical map, then John 3:16 is a mountain. The verse reads, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” When I was growing up in New Jersey in the 1970s and 1980s, a well-known figure on television was a man who wore a rainbow-coloured wig at prominent events like football games and held up a sign saying “John 3:16.” Television cameras found him irresistible. As the so-called “Rainbow Man” explained in a documentary film made about him in the late 1990s, “if you’ve watched sports over the last 14 years I used to wear the rainbow wig on nationally televised sporting events, was known as Rock ’n Rollen. After I was saved I was known as John 3:16 because of the bedsheet signs that I hung in the stadiums” (Green 2005).

As this example suggests, John 3:16 often serves explicitly evangelical purposes. More than 150 years ago, the Methodist missionary James Royce described how he used John 3:16 as a weapon in an encounter with a hostile man at a village on Vitilevu:

...[I] met with an impudent fellow, who upon being hailed stated that he was lotu pope [i.e., Roman Catholic], and raising his club said in an air of triumph, this is my book, i[.] e[.] New Test[ament], and taking mine from under my arm I held it up, saying, and this is mine, from which I will read you a verse and then you shall read me one from yours. I turned to John 3:16 and then requested him to give me a portion from his book; the fellow seemed heartily ashamed and soon skulked away. (Royce 1855-1862: 135)

It is not clear whether the man really was a Catholic, or whether he said this simply to antagonize the Methodist missionary. Whatever the case, Royce reached for John 3:16 as the most useful verse with which to engage a hostile other in a missionary encounter.

Similarly, Florence Young recalled a Solomon Islander missionary in Malaita who told her that he had written the text of John 3:16 in English on a piece of paper and attached it to a tree. Young asked him why he had done so, considering that many of his fellow villagers did not understand English and

were unable to read. He answered that God might see the sign, and the devil might see it too, and the devil “might...say, ‘Eh, man belong God here, more better I clear out!”’ (Young 1925: 150). In earlier years, Young had recognized the verse’s pedagogical importance, affixing a print of the verse on the wall of her school for laborers from the Solomons and Vanuatu. “Pointing to the first word,” she wrote:

the teacher said “God”; the whole class repeated the word—“God”; “So,” “So”, “loved,” “loved.” Three words were enough to begin with. We would go over and over the same words till the scholars were quite sure of them. The first clause was read by the class. Then followed an attempt to explain this one clause in pidgin English. Sentence by sentence [sic] the whole verse was thus taught. Each scholar was given a large-type New Testament, and the verse was underlined with red ink.

Romans vi. 23, and other Gospel texts followed; the aim being to teach, not reading, but the truths contained in the texts. To our surprise, however, we found after a few months that it was a very successful method of teaching reading.

The Boys not only pored over their Testaments in their spare time, but taught the marked texts to their friends, so that by-and-by it was no longer necessary to begin with John iii. 16. A newcomer had learnt that before he came to school.

(Young 1925: 40)

Royce and Young both demonstrate how missionaries in Oceania saw John 3:16 as an especially useful verse, a text that could both defend against hostility and perhaps persuade listeners to consider other Christian messages.

During my research on Methodism in Kadavu in the 1990s and 2000s, however, I did not hear John 3:16 referred to often. Considering Kadavuans’ deep expertise on the Bible, I have no doubt that everyone was familiar with it—but it was not mentioned as often as the first half of Genesis 1:26, in my experience. In thinking about why this might be the case, I was intrigued by comments made by Cliff Bird as he taught a Gospel and Culture class at



the Pacific Theological College in 2009. In one of them, Bird mentioned the popularity of John 3:16 in the Solomon Islands. Later, I interviewed him and asked him to explain his observations on the verse. Bird said that it is “a quite popular text in the Solomon Islands, and particularly so within the United Church in Solomon Islands, formerly Methodist Mission to Solomon Islands.” Reference to it often takes one of two forms, he said: “one, there could be a direct reading of the scripture...an exposition of that, or secondly, which also happens quite a lot, is that people would paraphrase it in one way or the other. And so, God’s love, the love of God for people, becomes almost like an annual theme that goes throughout the year.”² Described as an annual theme, John 3:16 seems like a constant, a verse that is always there. In this regard, it is useful to note Debra McDougall’s recent argument that proselytism is such a pervasive activity in the Solomons that the nation has developed what she calls a generalized “evangelical public culture” (McDougall 2013). In conservative, Methodist-dominated Kadavu, such evangelism was not prominent in the 1990s and 2000s—or at least, living in the household of the superintendent minister for the Methodist Church, based in Tavuki, I did not notice it.

The Fullness of Texts in Contexts: The Work of Joel Robbins

An anthropologist who has written with great insight on the cultural contextualization of Bible verses is Joel Robbins, who conducted fieldwork among the Urapmin of highland Papua New Guinea in the early 1990s. Robbins’ scholarship is distinguished by its careful balance of fine-grained ethnographic details with full consideration of their broad theoretical implications.

Because of their strongly eschatological orientation, Urapmin turn to the Book of Revelation frequently; it is the book “they pore over more than any other” (Robbins 2004: 163). In attempting to understand the nature of the modern nation and their own place within it, they frequently turn to Romans, where they note the “general point that everyone lives ‘under’ (*i stap ananit*) a government”; and they look specifically to Romans 13:1 for the claim that governments derive their legitimacy from God (Robbins 2004: 170-171). When planning their sermons, Urapmin preachers often turn to passages such as Galatians 5:22-23, which list desirable qualities (“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith...Meekness, temperance”), helping

them design sermons which allow preachers “to reach their goal of reminding their listeners of what is good and what is bad and of motivating them to live ethically” (Robbins 2004: 229)³.

The verse on which Robbins has done his fullest anthropological analysis is John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” According to Robbins, the Urapmin take great interest in John 1:1, but they also have difficulties with it. The verse troubles Urapmin because of its allusive, poetic quality which means it cannot be given a strictly literal reading. What, ultimately, does it mean to identify, pair, and equate a creator with language? But the verse appeals to Urapmin, too, because it reflects their understanding of the importance of speech to Christian ritual. Urapmin often say, “God is nothing but talk,” which sounds insulting in Urapmin as well as in English, Robbins notes; but it effectively points to “problems many Urapmin people have with the Christian promotion of speech to the center of religious life” (Robbins 2001: 905). In their traditional pre-Christian rituals, Urapmin devalued the importance of speech, but evangelical Christianity emphasizes it. In other words, for Urapmin, the verse says something true about the role of language in Christianity which they have found troubling. Robbins goes on to argue that Urapmin pray with great frequency because prayer, by being addressed to an all-knowing and all-powerful listener, God, validates their ongoing self-construction as new and markedly sincere Christian subjects: “By acting as a listener who can connect intention and speech, God makes of the Urapmin speakers who can do the same” (Robbins 2001: 907).

Conclusion

This article has offered a brief overview of some practices of Oceanic Biblical Interpretation, focusing on passages that feature prominently in particular cultural contexts. In conclusion, I would like to make three summary points. First, in asking about Bible verses’ relative prominence, I am posing an anthropological question—and specifically, a question about textual circulation—rather than a theological one about ultimate meaningfulness. Second, the fact that one verse is referred to more often than others in a particular cultural context does not mean that its meaning is agreed upon



by everyone; indeed, a degree of ambiguity may permit multiple readings which allow people to agree on the verse's importance while not calling attention to the ways their interpretations differ. Finally, a culturally engaged approach to understanding the Bible's use suggests that cultural diversity is best understood by theologians and anthropologists working together. The published works I have drawn on in this article are mostly from the field of academic anthropology, but my thoughts on the subject have been developed in dialogue with theologians in Fiji and New Zealand, to whom I am grateful.

Notes

¹ Tippett wrote more generally that “[t]he whole field of Biblical parable and allegory has been taken over and is in use daily [in Fiji], especially from the Old Testament Book of Proverbs and the sayings of Jesus. However the particular sayings used most frequently by Fijians are not those most frequently used by Westerners” (Tippett 1960: 90).

² I followed up by asking about a difference he had mentioned in the class between the way the verse is normally used and his own interpretation, and Bird replied, in part, “In the original translation of the New Testament—they’re now working on the Old Testament—but in the original translation of the New Testament... the way that [John 3:16] was translated is very much human-centered, very anthropological.... It says, ‘For God so loved *the people* of the world’; not “the world,” but “God so loved the people of the world,” so the focus there, the emphasis is on the people and not on whatever else there is, and that’s one of my disagreements with the translation.”

³ Indeed, Robbins observes that Urupmin do not often preach on narratives, because everyone is expected to know Bible stories already and preachers “assume their audience can draw on them as needed for interpretive purposes” (Robbins 2004: 229). See also Robbins (2004: 163; 267, 269; and 294, 299) on Urupmin attention to Mark 13:2 and 1 Thessalonians 5:2; James 5:14 and 5:19; and Matthew 25:1-13, respectively.



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